Al-Mīzān

An Exegesis of the Qurʾan

ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī

Translated by: Tawus Raja

Volume 30 (Chapters 26 & 27)
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In the Name of God,
the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to God, the Lord of the Worlds;
the Beneficent, the Merciful;
the Master of the Day of Judgment;
Thee only we serve, and to Thee alone we beseech
for help;
Guide us in the straight path;
The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed
favors,not of those against whom Thou art
wrathful, nor of those who are astray.

O' God! send Your blessings to the head of
Your messengers and the last of
Your prophets,
Muḥammad and his pure and cleansed progeny.
Also send Your blessings to all Your
prophets and envoys.

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Arabic Transliteration Key

Arabic Letters	Transliteration	Arabic Letters	Transliteration
ا	ā	ع	ʿ
ب	b	غ	gh
ت	t	ف	f
ث	th	ق	q
ج	j	ك	k
ح	ḥ	ل	l
خ	kh	م	m
د	d	ن	n
ذ	dh	ه	h
ر	r	و	w/ū
ز	z	ى	y/ī
س	s	ء	ʾ
ش	sh	ة	-
ص	ṣ	ـَ	a
ض	ḍ	ـِ	i
ط	ṭ	ـُ	u
ظ	ẓ		

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Publisher's Note

In an effort to make the text more accessible to English-speaking readers, the editors have chosen to use English names for the prophets and figures (as listed below but not limited to) and to use Anglicized terms that now appear in English dictionaries.

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Ādam	Adam	Mūsā	Moses
David	David	Sulaymān	Solomon
Aaron	Aaron	Shuʿayb	Jethro
Ibrāhīm	Abraham	Yaʿqūb	Jacob
ʿĪsā	Jesus	ʾAyyūb	Job
Isḥāq	Isaac	Yūshaʿ	Joshua
Ismāʿīl	Ishmael	Joseph	Joseph
Jibrāʾīl	Gabriel	Zakariyyā	Zachariah
Mary	Mary	ʿUzayr	Ezra

Arabic terms and names have been transliterated according to the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*).

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For ease of reading, glyphs and traditional honorifics such as "peace be upon him" or (s.a.w.) which are commonly used as a gesture of respect after the name of the Prophet Muhammad, the Imams, or other sacred figures have been omitted from this text. No disrespect is intended, and may God's peace and blessings be upon them all!

Foreword

This volume of *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*, which corresponds to the Arabic volume 15, is our second edition which follows the first published in 2016. The English volume thirty covers the *tafsīr* of two complete chapters, Sūrah Al-Shuʿara (Chapter 26) and Sūrah al-Naml (Chapter 27).

The first discussion in this volume is about Divine Knowledge and how it applies to objects and events. This discussion follows the commentary on verse 26:8 and the author clarifies the implausibility of what some exegetes have said that the verse refers to God's foreknowledge of the people's disbelief. This is followed by a study of the meaning and implications of the negation of Divine injustice. The author probes these issues meticulously and with penetrating insight as he has done in other such discussions.

The last discussion concerns Prophet Solomon (peace be upon him) in the light of the verses 15-44 of Sūrah al-Naml and it consists of four sections dealing with his life and personality.

We would like to thank all the individuals and scholars who helped in this project and provided the translator with constructive feedback. In particular, we are indebted to Dr. Amina Inloes for reviewing and editing the entire manuscript. Needless to say, the translator bears complete responsibility for any mistakes or shortcomings in this work.

Tawheed Institute Australia Ltd
January 2021

About the Translator

Tawus Raja is an independent translator who has studied Qurʾanic exegesis and Islamic philosophy not through formal university or seminary education. His other works include Shining Sun: In Memory of ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī (London: ICAS Press, 2011), Divine Flashes of Ḥusayn (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2011) by Āyatullāh Ḥusaynī Ṭihrānī, and Treatise on Spiritual Journeying and Wayfaring (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2013) by ʿAllāmah Baḥr al-ʿUlūm.

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About the Author

The late Islamic scholar, thinker, and philosopher, ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī came from the celebrated Ṭabāṭabāʾī family of Tabriz. For the last three centuries, this family has produced generation after generation of renowned religious scholars in Azerbaijan (Iran). They are descendants of the second Imam, al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (peace be on both of them). The clan is also referred to with the title, al-Qāḍī.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad b. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī. ʿAllāmah was born in Tabriz on 29 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1321/17 March 1904. His father died in 1330 (1912). The orphaned child grew up in Tabriz, and after completing his religious education there, around 1341 (1923), he went to Najaf (Iraq), the most important center of Shia religious learning.

In Najaf, he began his higher studies with such illustrious scholars as Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nāʾīnī al-Gharawī (1277–1355/1860 or 1861–1936), the son of Shaykh al-Islām ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, and Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī (1296–1361/1878–1942), the son of al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Ḥasan, Muʿīn al-Tujjār.

These two were among the most prominent scholars in the Shia world. They were among the most prominent scholars not only in the fields of Shia jurisprudence and principles of jurisprudence, but in all Islamic subjects. Their opinions and theories are still followed today. Each founded his own school of thought and trained thousands of Shia scholars and jurists; and all the *marājiʿ al-taqlīd*[1] of the Shia world, to this day, are their students. Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī was a philosopher, unsurpassed in his time; a man of literature; and a poet in Arabic and Persian; he was a genius whose achievements made others look up to him as their ideal. Shaykh Nāʾīnī, with his bold opinions and decrees in the political and social life of the Muslim *umma*, has carved for himself a niche in history.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was much influenced by these two teachers, particularly by al-Iṣfahānī, in the development of his thought and

1 The highest authorities of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) whose rulings are followed by others.

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knowledge. A third influence was that of al-Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Jaʿfar Khwānsārī (1313– 80/1895 or 1896–1961), the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Mūsāwī, known as "the mathematician." ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was proud to have studied mathematics with him, and also wrote a book on higher mathematics, in which he applied some special theories of his teacher.

ʿAllāmah studied philosophy and metaphysics from al-Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Ḥusaynī Bādkūbahʾī; the latter was a student of al-Sayyid Riḍā, who studied with al-Sayyid Mūsā, a well-known teacher of philosophy and related subjects. In the fields of ethics and spirituality, ʿAllāmah received his training from his relatives, al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Qāḍī (1285–1366/1869–1947), a well-known scholar who established a school of spiritual and ethical training which still flourishes today.

All these influences combined to create in ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī a well-balanced academic and spiritual personality. He was a well-respected authority on religious subjects of jurisprudence and its fundamentals; a philosopher of independent views and new theories; and an inspired model of ethical and spiritual perfection. He not only taught morality, but also lived it. Yet it is also correct to state that his scholarship was overshadowed by his fame and prestige as a philosopher and a spiritual man.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī returned to Tabriz in 1353/1934, where he was welcomed as a religious scholar. There he spent his time teaching higher philosophy to willing disciples—but it was a small place for his talents. In 1364/1945 he migrated to Qum, the most important center of religious education in Iran. In Qum, he remained engaged in imparting the knowledge of ethics, philosophy, and the exegesis of the Qurʾan to those students who had already attained a high level of erudition. There he remained until his death on Sunday, 18 Muḥarram 1402/15 November 1981. May God bestow His mercy on him. Amen.

Many religious leaders of the present generation were and are among his students and disciples, the most famous being the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī (1338–99/1920–79).

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī's fame rests on his academic works—the most important being his great exegesis of the Qurʾan, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān.* It is said to be the foundation stone of the academic prestige which ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was accorded in the Muslim world.

Among his other works is *Uṣūl-i falsafah va ravish-i riʾalism* [Practical

and Philosophical Principles of Realism]. This book is a comparative study of Islamic philosophy and various modern anti-Islamic schools of thoughts, especially Marxism. His disciple, the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, annotated this work, thus making it easily accessible to the average man.

A third book, *Shiʿa dār Islām*, was first published in Persian; later it was published in English with the title, *Shiʾite Islam*. The ʿAllāmah wrote this book on the request of Professor Kenneth Morgan of Colgate University, to introduce Shiism to the West.

However, it is his *tafsīr, al-Mīzān* (published in 20 volumes in Arabic) which presents the true picture of the author's academic style and his way of thinking. In the preface to volume 1, the author outlines his plan, to explain the Qurʾan with the help of the Qurʾan itself. This he faithfully does, all the way through to the end of the *tafsīr*.

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Chapter 26

Al-Shuʿara (The Poets)

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Verses 1-9

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

The theme of this chapter is to comfort the Prophet in response to his people's denial of him and the Scripture that was revealed to him—which is referred to at the beginning of the chapter: *These are the verses of the clear Book* (26:2). They sometimes accused him of being insane and sometimes of being a poet. This chapter warns them by presenting the stories of a group of prophets: Moses, Abraham, Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot and Shuʿayb (Jethro). It talks about the consequences of their denial in order to comfort the Prophet so that he would not be grieved by their defiance, and so that the people denying him would learn a lesson.

This is one of the early chapters (*al-ʿatāʾiq*) that was revealed in Mecca since it includes the verse *And warn your nearest relations* (26:214). Comparing this verse in this chapter with verse 15:94 in Sūrah al-Ḥijr—*Therefore declare openly what you are bidden and turn aside from the polytheists*—it can be deduced that this chapter was revealed prior to Chapter 15. The flow of the verses suggests that this chapter was revealed entirely in Mecca. Some exegetes say the last five verses were revealed in Medina. Some say the verse "*Is it not a sign to them that the learned men of the Israelites know it?*" (26:197) was revealed in Medina. We shall discuss these below.

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طسم ﴿١﴾ تِلْكَ آياتُ الْكِتابِ الْمُبِينِ ﴿٢﴾

(26:1-2) Ṭā Sīn Mīm. *These* (tilka) *are the verses of the clear Book* (al-mubīn).

"These" refers to the verses of the Qur'an, including what will come

in this chapter and what has been revealed before. *Tilka* (lit. "those") is a demonstrative pronoun used for objects at a distance. Here it indicates the lofty position and high status of the verses [as if they are at a height far away]. *Mubīn* is derived from the verb *abāna* which means "to appear, to manifest."

The implied meaning is: These verses with such a lofty position and high status are the verses of a Book that is clearly and evidently sent from God since it has the characteristics of a miracle—even though these defiant polytheists deny it and sometimes accuse it of being inspirations by jinn-devils, and sometimes call it poetry.

لَعَلَّكَ باخِعٌ نَفْسَكَ أَلاَّ يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٣﴾

(26:3) *Perhaps you will die of grief* (bākhiʿun, from bukhūʿ) *because they do not believe.*

Bākhiʿ is to die of grief. The reason for this dying is explained next: *because they do not believe*. The implied meaning is: It seems like you are about to die of grief because they do not believe in the verses of this Book that was revealed to you. The verses imply a sense of disapproval [that is, the Prophet should not do this to himself], and their purpose is to comfort the Prophet.

إِنْ نَشَأْ نُنَزِّلْ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ السَّماءِ آيَةً فَظَلَّتْ أَعْناقُهُمْ لَها خاضِعِينَ ﴿٤﴾

(26:4) *If We willed, We would send down upon them a sign from the heavens so that their necks would remain humbled before it* [fa-ẓallat aʿnāquhum lahā khāḍiʿīn].

The object of "will" [in "*If We willed…*"] is omitted as it is implied by the main clause of the sentence [that is, "We would send…"].[1] *Ẓalla* (lit. "would remain") is a verb that requires a subject and a predicate (called *fiʿl nāqiṣah*, lit. "an incomplete verb"). Its subject is *aʿnāquhum* (their necks), and its predicate is *khāḍiʿīn* (humbled, stooped).[2] Their necks are

1 In other words, what is meant is: "If We wish to send down a sign, then We will certainly do so." It is similar to when one says, "If you want I can wait," which means "If you want me to wait, then I can wait." (Trans.)

2 The meaning is: "Their necks would stoop and continue to stay humbled before the Qur'an." (Trans.)

described as "humble" even though humbleness is a quality of the soul. This is because the first place where humbleness manifests outwardly is the neck, by lowering the head and keeping it down in humility. This is a case of metonymy.

The implied meaning is: If We willed to send down upon them a sign that would humble them and force them to submit and believe, We would certainly send down such a sign. In that case they would be humbled before it, a humbleness that would be evident in them by the lowering of their necks.

Some have said that *aʿnāq* here means "groups." Others have suggested that it means "the heads and leaders of their community." Others have said that it is the second part of a possessive conjunction where the first part is omitted, and what is meant is: Then the "possessors of necks" among them would stoop to it in humbleness [where the word "possessors" is implied]. This last view is the least plausible one.

وَ ما يَأْتِيهِمْ مِنْ ذِكْرٍ مِنَ الرَّحْمنِ مُحْدَثٍ إِلاَّ كانُوا عَنْهُ مُعْرِضِينَ ۝٥

(26:5) ***And there does not come to them a new reminder from the Beneficent God but they turn aside from it.***

This verse talks about their persistence in denying God's signs. Aversion to God's remembrance is rooted in their hearts, such that whenever there is a renewed reminder of the Beneficent and they are called to Him, they push it aside and turn away.

What is meant is that they continually turn away from *every* reminder that comes to them, not that they dismiss the new reminder in favor of older ones. Referring to God as the Beneficent (*al-Raḥmān*) shows that the reminder that comes to them emanates from His attribute of universal beneficence (*al-raḥmat al-ʿāmmah*) which is the key to their well-being in this world and the next.

There is a discussion about the meaning of "a new reminder" at the beginning of Chapter 21 [under verse 21:2], which you may refer to if you wish.

فَقَدْ كَذَّبُوا فَسَيَأْتِيهِمْ أَنْبؤُا ما كانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِؤُنَ ۝٦

(26:6) ***So they have indeed rejected (the truth); therefore, the news* (anbāʾ)** ***of that which they mock shall soon come to them.***

The word "so" indicates that their rejection is *a* result of their persistent aversion [mentioned in the last verse]. Then, "*Therefore the news of…*" is in turn a result of their rejection. *Anbāʾ* is the plural of *nabaʾ*, meaning "important news." The implied meaning is: Since they persisted in being averse to every reminder that came to them, they have certainly rejected the truth. And because they have rejected and denied the truth, the "news" of what they have mocked—that is, God's signs and communications—will soon come to them. This "news" is the punishment which will soon overtake them in this world and the next.

أَ وَ لَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَى الْأَرْضِ كَمْ أَنْبَتْنا فِيها مِنْ كُلِّ زَوْجٍ كَرِيمٍ ﴿٧﴾

(26:7) ***And do they not look at*** **(yaraw ilā, from ruʾyah)** ***the earth, how many of every noble species*** **(zawjin karīm)** ***We have caused to grow in it?***

This is a censuring rhetorical question. The verse adds to an omitted part that is implied by the context. What is meant is: They persisted in turning away and rejecting the signs, and they did not look at these noble species of plants that We have grown on the earth.

Hence, *ruʾyah* (looking, sight) in this verse means *naẓar* (reflection, observation, view). That is why it has been used with the particle *ilā* (lit. "to," "toward").[1] *Karīm* means "beautiful, splendid, noble." *Zawjin karīm* (noble species) has been interpreted as "species of plants," for God has created various types of them. Others have suggested that the "noble species" that God has caused to grow also includes animals and human beings, because He says: *And Allah has made you grow out of the earth as a growth* (71:17).

إِنَّ فِي ذلِكَ لَآيَةً وَ ما كانَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٨﴾

(26:8) ***Most surely there is a sign in that, but most of them were not believers.***

"In that" refers to the growth of every noble *zawj* (lit. "species," also meaning "pair") that was mentioned in the last verse. This growth involves creating a mate for everything and completing the imperfections of each

1 An English equivalent would be "reflect upon." (Trans.)

mate by means of the other mate.[1] Thereby all species are guided toward the intended goal of their existence and their ultimate felicity. Now, how could One Who does this neglect to guide humankind? How could He *not* direct people to their felicity, and not call them to what is good for them in this world and the next? This is how the growth of plants is a sign.

***…but most of them were not believers* (mā kāna aktharuhum muʾminīn):** That is: It is not expected that most of them will believe given that aversion has become second nature for them, and they no longer have the capacity to believe. This verse is effectively similar to: *But they would not believe in what they had rejected before* (10:74). In numerous places in the Qur'an, moral vices and deep-rooted iniquity in the heart are identified as the causes of disbelief and evil-doing.

This should clarify the implausibility of what some exegetes have said: "The verse refers to God's foreknowledge of their disbelief." First of all, this is not the meaning that primarily comes to mind from this verse. Second, there is no evidence that this is what the text means [as a non-apparent meaning]. On the contrary, there is evidence against it, because the previous verses were about aversion becoming second nature to them and becoming firmly rooted in their souls.

It has been narrated from Sībawayh that *kāna* is an extra word in the verse that connects the two parts but does not add to the meaning. Then the meaning would be: "Most of them are not believers" (*mā aktharuhum muʾminīn*).[2] Although this meaning is true in its own right, the meaning that we proposed above is more congruent with the context here.

وَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿٩﴾

(26:9) *And most surely your Lord is the Mighty, the Merciful.*

That is: Since He is Mighty and Invincible, He takes those who turn

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1 *Zawj* has two main meanings: "species and pair." Here the author has taken the latter, while in the previous verse he had taken the former. This implies that both meanings can apply to the verse. (Trans.)

2 This is how many translators like Pickthall and Arberry have translated the verse. In other words, they have dropped the *kāna*. The verb *kāna* in these cases indicates past or present participle, expressing continuous action. The literal translation would be: "Most of them were not (or have not been) believers." (Trans.)

away from His remembrance, reject His signs and mock His communications, and gives them their deserved punishment in this world and the next. And since He is Merciful, He sends His reminder to them to guide them, forgives the believers and gives respite to the disbelievers.

Intellectual Discussion about Divine Knowledge: How it Applies to Objects and Events

Regarding "*but most of them were not believers*" (26:8), *Rūḥ al-maʿānī* says:

> It has been said that it means: It was not in God's knowledge that they would believe. Since this interpretation suggests causality, some have objected that God's knowledge is not a cause of their lack of belief, because knowledge of an event is subsequent to the event, not vice versa.

The answer to this objection is that God's eternal knowledge is subsequent to the *māhiyyah* (quiddity, reality, idea) of a specific event in a specific point in time. That is, what distinguishes that knowledge from other knowledge is that it is knowledge of this specific *māhiyyah*. However, the *wujūd* (existence, occurrence, external realization) of that *māhiyyah* is subsequent to His eternal knowledge which is itself subsequent to the *māhiyyah*. Therefore, He knew eternally that this event with these qualities and specifications is supposed to occur and appear in what is to come. This means that the idea and concept that they will die in a state of disbelief takes precedence to His eternal knowledge, but its external realization is subsequent to His eternal knowledge.

This argument appears time and again in the works of *al-mujabbirah* (the determinists, the proponents of *jabr*), especially al-Imam al-Rāzī. They use it to prove *jabr* (determinism, compulsion) and refute *ikhtiyār* (choice, free will). The essence of the argument is that people's actions are known to God from pre-eternity. Thus, people's actions will necessarily occur just according to His eternal knowledge, or else His knowledge would be ignorance, and He is exalted above that. This shows that people are *forced* to do things, and are not free to act as they will. This argument has been challenged by the assertion that knowledge is subsequent to a known event, not vice versa. They have answered this as we saw above, that God's eternal knowledge is subsequent to the *māhiyyah* (quiddity, reality) of the event, but the event is subsequent to His knowledge in its

external realization and occurrence.

However, this argument is neither valid nor sound [that is, both its structure and its premises are problematic]. Furthermore, it suffers from the following fallacies:

(1) This argument takes it for granted that quiddity (*māhiyyah*) has some subsistence and existence in pre-eternity, which necessitates the precedence of quiddity over existence (*wujūd*). However, quiddity has no such precedence and principality.

(2) The argument, the objection raised against it, and the answer to the objection are all based on God's knowledge being an *acquired* knowledge that pertains to *mental concepts* like our knowledge. However, it has been proven that this is not true. Instead, all things are known to Him by direct and presential knowledge. He has two levels of knowledge: (a) direct and presential knowledge of things before their existence, which is identical with His Essence; (b) direct and presential knowledge of things after their existence, which is identical with the very existence of the things. Details on this can be found in the relevant works.

(3) His eternal knowledge of known events in pre-eternity is knowledge in the real and literal sense. That is, He has eternal knowledge of an event as it will occur, including all of its existential characteristics, features and conditions. Among these specifications—of the external existence and occurrence of an event—is that it will be comprised of certain voluntary movements by a specific subject who does them out of free will, as opposed to other movements that the same subject does involuntarily.

If so, then it means that the object of God's knowledge is not some unspecified action in general, because such unspecified and undetermined events are not actualized externally to begin with. Rather, the object of His knowledge includes the specifications of the act, including that it is an act that is performed voluntarily and out of free will. Then that action must necessarily emanate from the choice and free will of the subject, because otherwise the known event would violate God's knowledge. It cannot be that the object of His knowledge is initially [that is, eternally] a voluntary act, but then this very knowledge would push aside the attribute of volition from the known event and make it compulsory.

The fallacy in the above argument is that it supposes the object of God's pre-eternal knowledge to be unspecified and unconditional acts instead of specified acts. They have consequently assumed the unspecified

act to be necessary, whereas what is necessary is the occurrence of the act *with* the quality of being voluntary. The case of such an action is similar to something that is contingent by itself but necessary by something else [that is, an effect that draws necessity from its cause]. Therefore the argument confuses unconditional action with action that is qualified by free will.

This shows the unsoundness of their argument that God's pre-eternal knowledge necessitates their disbelief [involuntarily], because the object of God's pre-eternal knowledge is an action with all of its qualities and characteristics. If He has knowledge of a voluntary act, then what is necessitated is the occurrence of that act *voluntarily*, and if He has knowledge of an involuntary act, then that necessitates the occurrence of that act *involuntarily*.

In addition, as some *mujabbirah* have admitted, if "*but most of them were not believers*" (26:8) meant that it was impossible for them to believe *because* according to God's pre-eternal knowledge they will not believe, then they would have taken this as an argument against the Prophet to justify their disbelief [but they never did so; it is not reported in history].

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning verse 26:4 (*If We willed, We would send down upon them a sign from the heavens so that their necks would remain humbled before it*) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Their necks—that is, the Umayyads'—will be humbled, and this will be the cry (*al-ṣayḥah*) from the sky in the name of the Master of the Command (Ṣāḥib al-Amr) [that is, Imam al-Mahdī].[1]

Author's comment: The same idea has been narrated by al-Kulaynī in *Rawḍat al-kāfī*, al-Ṣadūq in *Kamāl al-dīn*, al-Mufīd in *al-Irshād*, and al-Shaykh [al-Ṭūsī] in *al-Ghībah*. Given the context of the verse this is clearly not the interpretation of the verse but it is an application of it (*jary*).

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1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of his [al-Qummī's] father, on the authority of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr.

Verses 10-68

From here on the chapter narrates the story of a series of previous prophets: Moses, Aaron, Abraham, Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot and Shuʿayb (Jethro). These accounts are meant to show that the Prophet's people are following the path of those people and will thus end up where they ended up: most of them did not believe, and therefore God overtook them with punishment in this world and the next. This is seen by the ending of the story of each prophet with: *Most surely there is a sign in this, but most of them were not believers. And most surely your Lord is the Mighty, the Merciful* (26:67-68, 26:103-104, 26:121-122, 26:139-140, 26:158-159, 26:174-175). It is the same ending that we saw at the beginning of the chapter (26:8-9) about the aversion of the Prophet's people from him. This recurrence is to connect the two trends with each other.

All of this is to comfort the Prophet so that he would not be distressed. It is to assure him that he is not the only messenger, and that it can only be expected that his people would treat him the same way that previous peoples treated their messengers. These stories also involve a sense of threat and warning to his people, as we see at the beginning of Abraham's story: *And recite to them the story of Abraham* (26:69).[1]

وَ إِذْ نادى رَبُّكَ مُوسى أَنِ ائْتِ الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿١٠﴾ قَوْمَ فِرْعَوْنَ أَ لا يَتَّقُونَ ﴿١١﴾

(26:10-11) *And when your Lord called out to Moses: Go to the unjust people, The people of Pharaoh: Will they not guard (against evil)?*

That is: And remember when your Lord called out to Moses and sent him as a messenger to the people of Pharaoh in order to save the Children of Israel (as has been discussed in detail in Sūrah Ṭā-Hā and

1 The warning is implied by "*recite to them*," because it shows that the story is a message for them, and since they had been doubting and disbelieving, this message would be one of warning and threat. (Trans.)

other chapters).

…Go to the unjust people: This identifies what the call was. The Qur'an first describes them as being unjust [in verse 10], and then it identifies them as the people of Pharaoh [in verse 11]. This is to show the wisdom behind sending a messenger: God sent a messenger because they were unjust—both in the sense that they were polytheists,[1] and because they tortured the Israelites, as He says in Sūrah Ṭā-Hā: *Go both to Pharaoh, surely he has become inordinate…So go you both to him and say: Surely we are two messengers of your Lord; therefore send the Children of Israel with us and do not torment them* (20:43, 47).

…Will they not guard (against evil)? "They" in the third person shows that God is rebuking them in their absence when He appointed Moses to bring His message. It can be restated as follows: Tell them that my Lord blames you for forsaking *taqwā* (self-restraint, Godwariness) and says, "Will you not guard (against evil)?"

قالَ رَبِّ إِنِّی أَخافُ أَنْ یُکَذِّبُونِ ﴿۱۲﴾ وَ یَضِیقُ صَدْرِی وَ لا یَنْطَلِقُ لِسانِی فَأَرْسِلْ إِلی هارُونَ ﴿۱۳﴾

(26:12-13) *He said: O my Lord! surely I fear (akhāfu, from khawf) that they will reject me (yukadhdhibūni); And my breast straitens, and my tongue is not eloquent; therefore, send (the angel of revelation) to Aaron (to help me).*

Majmaᶜ al-Bayān says:

> *Khawf* is the disturbance of the soul due to expecting some harm. Its opposite is *amn* (security), which is the serenity and assurance of the soul to gain some benefit.

In terms of usage, *khawf* is most commonly used when a person senses an evil and acts cautiously, irrespective of whether or not his soul is agitated. *Khashyah* (awe, fear) is the inner feeling that is imprinted on the soul due to expecting some evil, such that it causes anxiety and agitation. That is why God says that His prophets have no *khashyah* of anyone other than God, but sometimes He has attributed *khawf* to them. He says: *Those who deliver the messages of Allah and fear Him, and do not fear* (lā yakhshawna, from khashyah) *anyone but Allah* (33:39), and *And if you*

1 See verse 31:13. (Trans.)

fear (takhāfanna, from khawf) *treachery on the part of a people* (8:58).

***…surely I fear that they will reject me* (yukadhdhibūni):** That is: I fear that the people of Pharaoh will accuse me of lying (*kidhb*, *kadhib*).

And my breast straitens, and my tongue is not eloquent: These two points here are *marfūʿ* in terms of inflection, which means that they add to "*surely I fear*." Therefore, he brought three reasons [for his request]: (1) fear of rejection; (2) distress (lit. "straitening of the breast"); (3) ineloquence. In the recitation of Yaʿqūb and others, the two points are *manṣūb* in terms of inflection, which means that they add to "*that they will reject me*," which is more straightforward in terms of meaning. In that case, his reason would be one: fear of rejection, which in turn would cause distress (straitening of the breast) and ineloquence. This also matches the verse in Chapter 28 (al-Qaṣaṣ), where only one reason is given: fear of rejection.[1]

…therefore send (the angel of revelation) to Aaron (to help me): That is: Send the angel of revelation to Aaron so that he may help me in conveying the message. When someone is stricken by a calamity or faces some difficulty he is told, "Send for (*arsil ilā*) so-and-so," which means, "Ask him for help and take him as your aid."

This sentence is a conclusion of "*Surely I fear…*" (26:12). Talking about the fear of rejection—which is accompanied by the constriction of the breast and the ineloquence of the tongue—were preparatory points to say this and request that messengership be bestowed upon Aaron.

He [Moses] did not mention the above request and justification as way of fleeing from the burden of messengership or resigning from it, but he wanted his brother to also be made a messenger so that he would help him and testify to his truthfulness in his message and mission. *Rūḥ al-maʿānī* says:

The evidence for this meaning is that he imbedded the request of "*send to Aaron*" in the middle of his four concerns: after the first three and before the fourth one: *And they have a claim against me…* (26:14). This shows that his request was not a final resignation of responsibility because he continues to talk about his mission [to Pharaoh and his people].

This is a good observation, and it has been clarified in Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ

1 Based on the latter meaning, the verse should be translated as follows: I fear that they would reject me, and this would cause my breast to straiten and my tongue to be ineloquent. The evidence from Chapter 28 is verses 28:33-34, quoted below. (Trans.)

where He recounts the story: *My Lord! Surely I killed one of them, so I fear lest they slay me; and my brother, Aaron, he is more eloquent of tongue than I; therefore, send him with me as an aide, to testify to my truthfulness: surely I fear that they will reject me* (28:33-34).

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وَ لَهُمْ عَلَيَّ ذَنْبٌ فَأَخافُ أَنْ يَقْتُلُونِ ﴿١٤﴾

(26:14) *And they have a claim* (dhanbun) *against me; therefore, I fear that they may slay me.*

Al-Rāghib says:

The original meaning of *dhanb* is to grab the tail (lit. *dhanab*) of something. *Dhanabtuhu* means "I got it by the tail." The term *dhanb* is used for any action that has an undesirable consequence, in the sense that the outcome is something that comes after it [like a tail].

The verse refers to the story of him [that is, Moses] killing a man.[1] It was a sin (*dhanb*) against him according to *their* view and judgment, or according to the lexical meaning that we just quoted. However, there is no evidence for it being a sin in the sense of disobeying God. We shall discuss this in the exposition of Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ, if God wills.

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قالَ كَلاَّ فَاذْهَبا بِآياتِنا إِنَّا مَعَكُمْ مُسْتَمِعُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

(26:15) *He said: By no means* (kallā)*! So go, both of you, with Our signs; surely We are with you, hearing.*

"By no means" (*kallā*) negates what he said about the fear of being killed. It involves giving him security and confidence that they will not be able to kill him. No response is mentioned to his request for the appointment of Aaron other than "*so go you both with Our signs*," which implies that his request was granted.

…So go, both of you, with Our signs: The conjunction "so" (letter *fā*ʾ at the beginning of *fa-idhhabā*) indicates that what is said here is a result of the negation *kallā*. Therefore the sentence means: "Go you both with Our signs and have no fear." Then this is justified by: *Surely We are with you, hearing.*

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***…surely We are with you* (maʿakum), *hearing* (mustamiʿūna, from istimāʿ):** The pronoun "you" in "with you" (*maʿakum*) is in the plural form

1 See verses 28:15-16. (Trans.)

[as opposed to a dual form in Arabic: *maʿakumā*, "with you two"]. Thus it refers to Moses, Aaron and the people whom they were sent to. Some exegetes have suggested that it only refers to Moses and Aaron because plural is used for two or more [even in Arabic]. However, as other exegetes have noted, this statement is not true, and [even if it were tue] it is certainly not applicable here because of the usage of dual form (*tathniyah*) before and after it.[1]

Istimāʿ means to give ear to some speech or discussion. Here what is meant is: "We are present with you and are giving full attention toward what is going on between you and Pharaoh and his people as you convey your message to them." This is seen in the narration of the same story in Sūrah Ṭā-Hā: *Fear not, surely I am with you both: I do hear and see* (20:46).

The gist of the verse is: Never! They will not be able to kill you. So go to them, both of you, with Our signs and have no fear, for We are present right there with you. We are watching over you and care about what happens between you.

فَأْتِيا فِرْعَوْنَ فَقُولا إِنَّا رَسُولُ رَبِّ الْعالَمِينَ ﴿١٦﴾ أَنْ أَرْسِلْ مَعَنا بَنِي إِسْرائِيلَ ﴿١٧﴾

(26:16-17) *Then come to Pharaoh and say: Surely we are messengers from the Lord of all realms. Then send with us the Children of Israel.*

This is an explanation of what was said in the previous verse: *So go, both of you, with Our signs* (26:15).

…say: Surely we are messengers* (rasūl) *from the Lord of all realms: This is subsequent to going to Pharaoh. The word "messenger" (*rasūl*) is mentioned in the singular on the basis that each of them was a messenger, or on the basis that the two of them had the same message, which was: *Send with us the Children of Israel* (26:17). Another possibility suggested by some exegetes is that *al-rasūl* was originally an infinitive (that is, message, mission), and an infinitive is used equally for singular and plural. Therefore

1 In addition to singular and plural, the Arabic language has a dual form of nouns, pronouns and verbs called *tathniyah*. The second person verb conjugates in "*So go, both of you*" (26:15) and "*Then come to Pharaoh and say*" (26:16) are in the dual form. (Trans.)

what is meant is: Surely we are the bearers of the message (*dhawā rasūl*) of the Lord of all realms [where "bearers" is implied].

Then send **(arsil, from irsāl)** ***with us the Children of Israel:*** This is an exposition of their mission which is implied by the context. Their real request was the freedom and liberation of the Israelites. However, they referred to this as "sending" (*irsāl*) because the plan was that upon freedom they would return to the Holy Land which God had ordained for them,[1] which was the land of their forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.[2]

قالَ أَ لَمْ نُرَبِّكَ فِينا وَلِيداً وَ لَبِثْتَ فِينا مِنْ عُمُرِكَ سِنِينَ ﴿١٨﴾

(26:18) ***(Pharaoh) said: Did we not bring you up*** **(nurabbika)** ***as a child*** **(walīdan)** ***among us, and you tarried among us for (many) years of your life?***

This is a censuring rhetorical question. *Nurabbika* is derived from *tarbiyah* (grow, nurture, rear). *Walīd* means "child."

When Pharaoh turned to Moses and Aaron and heard their message, he recognized Moses. So he addressed him personally and scolded him with "*Did we not bring you up…?*" Regarding Moses' claim to messengership, he said: "You are the one whom we brought up while you were a child, and you lived among us for numerous years. We know all about your identity and character; we have not forgotten anything about you. So where has this mission come from? How could you come up with this while we are not ignorant of your origin?"

وَ فَعَلْتَ فَعْلَتَكَ الَّتِي فَعَلْتَ وَ أَنْتَ مِنَ الْكافِرِينَ ﴿١٩﴾

(26:19) ***And you did (that) deed of yours*** **(faʿlataka)** ***which you did, and you were one of the ungrateful.***

Faʿlah is a one-time instance of *fiʿl* (act, deed, work). It is [vaguely and indeterminately] described as "the deed which you did" in order to show how immense, atrocious and horrible it was, much like what God

1 See verse 5:21. (Trans.)

2 The root meaning of *irsāl* is "to release." However, the idea of "sending" is deduced from the phrase "with us." The implied meaning is: Release the Children of Israel so that they may come with us in the journey that we are about to take. This is equivalent to "sending" the Israelites. (Trans.)

says: *So there came upon them of the sea which came upon them* (20:78). It refers to his killing the Egyptian (Qibṭī) man.

***…and you were one of the ungrateful* (al-kāfirīn, from kufr):** Given the context (as we shall discuss below), *kufr* here means "being ungrateful for favors."[1] Pharaoh saw it ungrateful of Moses to kill the Egyptian man, causing disorder and disruption in his kingdom. Pharaoh had not killed him—like he had killed the other newborn sons of the Israelites—but instead he had raised him in his house. Moses was one of the Israelites, and Pharaoh viewed the Israelites as his slaves who were indebted to him as their lord for his favors upon them. Therefore, when one of them killed one of his people and upset order in his land, he saw it as crossing the line of servitude as well as ingratitude for his favors.

Pharaoh's objection in these two verses can be summarized as follows: You are the one whom we brought up as a little child and spent several years of your life with us; then you caused chaos in the land by killing someone, and thereby you were ungrateful to my favors. You are also one of my Israelite slaves. Given this, how did you come up with this mission? How can you be a messenger while you are this person whom we know?

This shows the implausibility of some exegetes' interpretation of *kufr* as disbelief which is the opposite of *īmān* (belief, faith), meaning "You disbelieved in my divinity" or "You were a disbeliever in the God that you are now talking about because you mingled with us for several years and were a follower of our religion." The same can be said about another suggested interpretation: "You were ungrateful to my favor toward you in particular."[2]

قالَ فَعَلْتُها إِذاً وَ أَنَا مِنَ الضَّالِّينَ ﴿٢٠﴾ فَفَرَرْتُ مِنْكُمْ لَمَّا خِفْتُكُمْ
فَوَهَبَ لِي رَبِّي حُكْماً وَ جَعَلَنِي مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿٢١﴾ وَ تِلْكَ نِعْمَةٌ تَمُنُّها
عَلَيَّ أَنْ عَبَّدْتَ بَنِي إِسْرائِيلَ ﴿٢٢﴾

(26:20-22) *He said: I did it then while* (idhan) *I was one of those*

1 *Kufr* can mean both "ingratitude" and "disbelief." Here the former meaning is intended based on the context. (Trans.)

2 What the author means here is that ungratefulness in the verse includes ungratefulness to Pharaoh for his favor to the Israelites in general, as well as ungratefulness for his favor to Moses in particular, not just the latter. (Trans.)

who were astray* (al-ḍāllīn, from ḍalāl)*; So I fled from you when I feared you; then my Lord granted me judgment* (ḥukman)*, and He made me one of the messengers; And is it a favor you remind me of—that you have enslaved* (ʿabbadta, from taʿbīd) *the Children of Israel?

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The pronoun "it" in "I did it" refers to "deed" (*faʿlah*) in the previous verse. *Idhan* (then, while, when) does not introduce a conditional clause here, but it rather means "at the time when" (*ḥīnaʾidhin*), as some exegetes have pointed out. *Taʿbīd* means "enslavement."

These three verses are Moses' answer to Pharaoh's objection. Comparing Moses' answer with Pharaoh's objections shows that Moses broke down Pharaoh's criticism of his messengership into three objections: (1) Pharaoh felt it would be unlikely and surprising for Moses to be a messenger because Pharaoh knew Moses' life situation: *Did we not bring you up as a child among us, and you tarried among us for (many) years of your life?* (26:18). (2) Pharaoh accuses Moses of causing mayhem and committing a crime by saying: *And you did (that) deed of yours which you did* (26:19). (3) Pharaoh reminded him of the favor he did to Moses since Moses had been one of his slaves by saying: *And you were one of the ungrateful* (26:19). In order to answer these, Moses had to reorder them. That is why Moses first addresses the second objection, then the first, and lastly the third.

He said: I did it then while I was one of those who were astray* (al-ḍāllīn, from ḍalāl)*: This is an answer to his objection about killing the Egyptian man. When Pharaoh said, "*(that) deed of yours which you did*" (26:19), he avoided mentioning what Moses did directly to make it seem more serious. Here, Moses does not mention it directly because explicit reference to the act [that is, killing] would have disturbed the audience.

Contemplating the text of Moses' answer and matching it with Pharaoh's objection show that what follows next—*So I fled from you when I feared you; then my Lord granted me judgment* (26:21)—is a continuation of his answer. Therefore, *ḥukm* (judgment, command, wisdom) in verse 26:21 is in contrast to *ḍalāl* (misguidance, error) in verse 26:20. Hence, *ḍalāl* here means "ignorance" as opposed to *ḥukm*, which means "having a correct view of reality and discerning how to act." Therefore, *ḥukm* here means "true judgment of the goodness or evilness of actions, and the

ability to act accordingly."[1] This is exactly what the prophets were given; [and for this reason] He says: *And We did not send any messenger but that he should be obeyed by Allah's permission* (4:64). Hence, the meaning is: I did what I did at the time while I was lost in ignorance about what was the best course of action and the right thing that I was supposed to do at that point. That is why I stood up to defend the person who asked for my help, but I did not know that this would cause the man to die, and that in turn would have adverse consequences which would force me to leave Egypt, escape to Midian, and be away from home for years.

The above explanation should show the implausibility of some of the interpretations suggested by the exegetes. For example, some have said: *Ḍalāl* here means *jahl* in the sense of imprudence, which is to act impulsively without caring about the consequences of the action, as a poem says:

> Let no one be imprudent (*yajhalanna*) in their treatment of us,
> For we shall outdo the imprudence (*jahl*) of the imprudent (*jāhilīnā*), nonetheless.

Others have said: *Ḍalāl* here means "love." This interpretation of *ḍalāl* has also been suggested in interpreting the response of Jacob's children to their father Jacob: *By Allah, you are most surely in your old* ḍalāl (12:95). That is, "You are in your old love for Joseph." Therefore the meaning is: I did it then while I was enamored with love for God and could not deviate from His love to anything else.[2]

The problem with the first view [that *ḍalāl* here means "imprudence"] is that it involves Moses' confessing to crime and sin. This is refuted by the verses in Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ which explicitly says that God gave him judgment and knowledge before the killing incident.[3]

There are two problems with the second view [that *ḍalāl* here means "love"]: (1) It does not match the context. (2) It is against the literary style of the Qur'an to refer to love for God as *ḍalāl* (misguidance, error).

Here are some other views about the verses:

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1 In other words, *ḥukm* involves two elements: (1) knowledge, insight and discernment about good and bad; (2) being grounded, firm and strong to exercise and implement that knowledge in action. It includes both the theoretical and practical aspect. (Trans.)

2 That is, I was so immersed in His love that I could not properly assess and contemplate the consequences of my action. (Trans.)

3 See verses 28:14-15. (Trans.)

Some have said: *Ḍalāl* means *jahl* (ignorance) in the sense of not intending something deliberately. Moses was not intending to kill the Qubṭī man, but only to punch him. Yet it led to his death, so in this sense he was ignorant because he did not intend this outcome.

Some have said: *Ḍalāl* here means "ignorance of divine laws," as some have interpreted the verse: *And [did He not] find you lost* (dāllan, from ḍalāl) *and guide you?* (93:7).

Some have said: *Ḍalāl* here means "to forget" (*nisyān*), as some have interpreted the verse: *So that if one of the two errs* (fa-taḍilla, from ḍalāl), *the second of the two may remind the other* (2:282). The meaning is: I did it while I had forgotten that it was unlawful, or while I had forgotten that punching can lead to death.

These views can be justified by referring and reducing them to our interpretation above.

***So I fled from you when I feared you; then my Lord granted me judgment* (ḥukman):** The conjunction "so" (the letter *fā'* at the beginning of *fa-farartu*) indicates that he fled *because* he killed the man. What made him fear and flee is mentioned in Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ: *And a man came running from the remotest part of the city. He said: O Musa! surely the chiefs are consulting together to slay you; therefore, depart (at once); surely I am of those who wish well to you. So he went forth therefrom, fearing, awaiting* (28:20-21).

Ḥukm, as we said above, means "having a correct view of the facts and robust discernment in acting according to them."

One might ask: Why does it explicitly say here that *ḥukm* (judgment) was given to him after killing the man, while Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ first talks about him being given *ḥukm*, and then it talks about him killing the man and escaping? The verses are: *And when he attained his maturity and became full grown, We granted him judgment and knowledge; and thus do We reward those who do good (to others). And he went into the city…* (28:14-15).

The answer is: In both places the word *ḥukm* is mentioned in the indefinite form (*nakirah*), indicating that each is a different *ḥukm* (judgment, command, wisdom). The Torah is specifically described as including *ḥukm*, as God says: *And they have the Torah wherein is Allah's judgment* (5:43). Yet we know that the Torah was revealed after Pharaoh drowned and the Children of Israel were freed.

This can be explained as follows: Moses was given different degrees of *ḥukm* at different stages of his life: before killing the Egyptian man, after his flight from Egypt, and after the drowning of Pharaoh. Each time God bestowed a new level of *ḥukm* upon him until it was completed by the revelation of the Torah. To illustrate this, think of certain individuals who go through three stages: (1) They start by the sound innate human nature (*fiṭrah*) which is naturally disinclined to evil and iniquity. (2) Then, as they grow up, they are gifted with a tempered sense of intellect and a good faculty for self-management. (3) They use these faculties to acquire virtues, and that is when they are given *taqwā* (self-restraint, Godwariness) as a second nature. These three qualities are really the same nature that grows and develops from one stage to another.

The above clarifies the implausibility of a suggested interpretation by some exegetes: *Ḥukm* means "prophethood" (*nubuwwah*). There is neither lexical nor a contextual evidence for this. Moreover, in other places in the Qur'an, God has mentioned both *ḥukm* and *nubuwwah* next to each other, showing that they are distinct from one another. For example He says: *That Allah should give him the Book and wisdom* (al-ḥukm) *and prophethood* (3:79); *These are they to whom We gave the book and wisdom* (al-ḥukm) *and prophethood* (6:89); *And certainly We gave the Book and wisdom* (al-ḥukm) *and prophethood to the Children of Israel* (45:16).

…and He made me one of the messengers: This is Moses' answer to Pharaoh's first objection, saying that it was unlikely and strange for him to be a messenger given what they knew about him. After all, they had brought him up as a child and he had lived amongst them for years.

The answer given here can be elaborated as follows: Their objection—that it would be unlikely for Moses to be a messenger given what they know his life history—would be applicable if messengership were something that could be acquired, such that one could expect it and see it coming after voluntarily meeting certain prerequisites and preliminaries. However this is not the case. Instead, messengership is something that is granted by God without the influence of ordinary means. Thus, he was made a messenger by God, just as he was granted judgment by Him without having to learn or acquire it himself through normal means. This is what we can deduce by contemplating the context of the verses.

Some exegetes have suggested that what when Pharaoh said, "*Did we not bring you up as a child among us…*" (26:18), he did not mean that it was

unlikely for Moses to be a messenger—as we interpreted it—but he meant to reproach Moses. It was Pharaoh's way of saying that Moses should feel obliged by his favor (*mann*, *imtinān*). The answer to this interpretation is: The verse [26:18] by itself can be interpreted in this way, but this interpretation is not supported by Moses' answers [26:21], and therefore it would ruin the flow and connection between the verses. If we accept this interpretation, then "*And is it a favor you remind me of…*" (26:22) would be Moses' answer to the idea of favors or obligations, but the answer and objection do not correspond.[1] Also, "*I did it then…*" (26:20) would be Moses' answer to the objection of killing the man, and that would leave "*and He made me one of the messengers*" (26:21) as an extra and unnecessary statement.

And is it* (tilka) *a favor you remind me of—that you have enslaved the Children of Israel? This is Moses' answer to the idea that he should feel obliged to Pharaoh, and that Moses is one of his slaves who has been ungrateful to Pharaoh for his favor. The answer can be elaborated as follows: What you count as a favor over me and scold me for being ungrateful about is your oppressive and unjust rule over the Children of Israel. Such oppressive and unjust enslavement is no favor. Therefore the question in the verse is a negating rhetorical one.

… that you have enslaved the Children of Israel? This is an exposition of "it" (*tilka*) at the beginning of the verse. What he is essentially saying is: Your claim that "*you were one of the ungrateful*" (26:19) implies that you did a favor to me, I have been ungrateful for it, and you are a guardian who bestows favors and blessings on me and on the Children of Israel—or on "us" as one group. However, these claims are not true because you are only in a position to grant favors to us *because* of your oppressive enslavement of us, which makes your resulting guardianship over us oppressive as well. An oppressor is by no means a guardian or someone who grants favors to those whom he has enslaved. Otherwise, this would mean that slavery is a favor, which is not the case.[2] Hence, the verse has mentioned the cause—that is, "*you have enslaved the Children of Israel*"— but what is

1 This is explained below. (Trans.)

2 To illustrate this, think of an oppressive ruler who imprisons some innocent individuals unjustly, and then expects them to feel indebted to him and be grateful to him for the food and water that he has given them in prison. (Trans.)

intended is its effect [that is, "Pharaoh's resulting authority and guardianship over the Children of Israel"].[1]

As we briefly said above, the exegetes have broken down Pharaoh's statement—*Did we not bring you up…* (26:18)—into two objections: (a) he reproaches Moses for doing a favor to him by bringing him up as a child; and (b) he accuses Moses of ungratefulness for his favor and causing disorder in the land by killing the Egyptian man. And as we said above, there are two problems with this analysis:

1. It makes the part where Moses says, "*and He made me one of the messengers*" (26:21) redundant and unnecessary.

2. It is not a suitable answer to say, "*And is it a favor you remind me of—that you have enslaved the Children of Israel?*" (26:22) in response to Pharaoh's reproach for doing him a favor by bringing him up in his house as a child.

The exegetes have provided the following points in order to explain the second problem:

First claim: This answer shows that Moses admitted that Pharaoh did a favor to him by raising him, but he denied that Pharaoh did a favor to him by not enslaving him. Therefore the verse really involves an implied omitted *hamzah* at the beginning [that is, *a-wa tilka…*], which makes the verse a negating rhetorical question. The implied meaning is: "And is it a favor which you remind me o— that you have enslaved the Children of Israel but you have not likewise enslaved me?"

Response: There is no evidence for this omission either in the words or the meaning of the verse.

Second claim: The answer denies that Pharaoh originally did a favor to him because he enslaved the Children of Israel. It is effectively saying: "You should not count raising me as a favor to me because you enslaved my people and thus annulled your good deed." Therefore, "*that you have enslaved…*" (26:22) explains why his raising of Moses was not a favor.

Response: Although this interpretation is more straightforward than the previous one, it is incomplete, because Pharaoh's enslaving the Children of Israel would not change the fact that he did a favor to Moses by raising him as a child.

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1 In simple terms the verse is saying: Your authority and guardianship over the Israelites is a result of your enslavement of them, and this is by no means a favor to me or them. (Trans.)

Third claim: What he means is: "You are reproaching me for not appreciating the favor you did to me; however, this was only a favor in the first place because you enslaved and oppressed the Children of Israel. That is why my mother had to cast me into the water [that is, the Nile] whereby you picked me up and raised me. Hence, raising me is not a favor because it was caused by oppressive enslavement."

Response: This is true, but the question is whether or not we can infer this from the text of the verse.

Fourth claim: What Moses is saying is: "You ordered my mother and other Israelites to raise me based on your enslavement of them. Hence, you did not do me a favor by bringing me up because what you did traces to your oppressive enslavement."

Response: This interpretation is farther away from the text of the verse compared to the previous one.

Fifth Claim: Moses is effectively confessing that Pharaoh did a favor to him by bringing him up. The effective meaning is: "You did me a favor by bringing me up instead of enslaving me as you enslaved the rest of the Children of Israel."

Response: There is no evidence in the verse that Moses meant "instead of enslaving me."

قالَ فِرْعَوْنُ وَ ما رَبُّ الْعالَمِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾ قالَ رَبُّ السَّماواتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ وَ ما بَيْنَهُمَا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُوقِنِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾ قالَ لِمَنْ حَوْلَهُ أَ لا تَسْتَمِعُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾ قالَ رَبُّكُمْ وَ رَبُّ آبائِكُمُ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٢٦﴾ قالَ إِنَّ رَسُولَكُمُ الَّذِي أُرْسِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ لَمَجْنُونٌ ﴿٢٧﴾ قالَ رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِ وَ الْمَغْرِبِ وَ ما بَيْنَهُما إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾ قالَ لَئِنِ اتَّخَذْتَ إِلهاً غَيْرِي لَأَجْعَلَنَّكَ مِنَ الْمَسْجُونِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(26:23-29) ***Pharaoh said: And what is the Lord of all realms? He said: The Lord of the heavens and the earth and what is between them, if you were people of certitude. (Pharaoh) said to those around him: Do you not hear? He said: Your Lord and the Lord of your fathers, the ancients. Said he: Most surely your Messenger who is sent to you is mad. He said: The Lord of the east and the west and what is between them, if you understand. Said he: If you take a god besides me, I will most certainly make you one of***

the imprisoned.

In the previous verses Pharaoh objected to Moses being a messenger, but Moses answered his objections. So now Pharaoh shifts the discussion to the One Who has sent Moses and has charged him with this mission. Moses previously described Him as "*the Lord of all realms*" (26:16). Here Pharaoh returns to that and asks for clarification: *And what is the Lord of all realms?* (26:23). This is the thread of discussion in these seven verses.

To understand what is meant in these verses, it is necessary to review the fundamental views of the polytheists regarding lordship (*rubūbiyyah*), although we have discussed it frequently in the other volumes of this book.

The polytheists believed that the existence of things traces back to a Creator Who is the Necessary Existent (*wājib al-wujūd*). In terms of necessity of existence, He is Singular, without any partner. However, He is far above being defined and delimited by any definition. He is too great to be encompassed by any comprehension or understanding. Therefore it would be impossible to worship Him because worship is a form of turning one's attention to something, and turning attention to something involves comprehending it.

This is why the polytheists deviated from worshipping God and seeking proximity to Him to seeking proximity to some of His noble creatures made of light or fire, who were close to Him and annihilated in Him [that is, having experienced *fanā'*]. Some examples are the angels, jinn and human saints who were purified from material defilement, who had been annihilated in the realm of divine, and who subsisted in that realm. Great kings—or at least some of them—had the same position in the sight of the ancient polytheists, including the Pharaoh at the time of Moses. They worshipped idols of these beings as a means of seeking nearness to God and so that they would intercede for them, meaning that they would bestow upon them the good that they controlled (as in the case of the angels), or refrain from striking them with the evil that was under their command (as in the case of the jinn). Each of these gods was in charge of directing a certain aspect of the universe such as love, hate, peace, war, or prosperity; or controlled some part of the universe like the sky, the earth, or humankind.

Therefore, every realm had a lord and god, which directed the affairs of that realm, such as the god of the earth and the god of the heavens. These were the angels, the jinn, and human saints. Then the realm of gods

had its own god which was Allah. They viewed Him as the God of gods and the Lord of lords.

Given our explanation above, it should now be clear that "*the Lord of all realms*" would not have made sense to the polytheists due to their beliefs, because each of the noble contingent beings [that they used to worship as a god] commanded only *one* realm, such as the heavens or the earth, so none of them could be called "the Lord of *all* realms." Similarly, "*the Lord of all realms*" could not mean God because they viewed Him as the Lord of the realm of lords and the God of the realm of gods, not the Lord of *all* realms. Finally, it could not mean someone else either, because no other type of lord was conceivable in their view.

Pharaoh said: And what is the Lord of all realms? Based on the above, here Pharaoh is asking about the reality of the Lord of all realms.

Pharaoh was a polytheist who used to worship idols, while at the same time he claimed to be a god himself. His worship of idols is inferred from [what his chieftains told him to arouse him against the Israelites]: *And should they [the Children of Israel] forsake you and your gods?* (7:127). His claim to divinity is inferred from the same verse and also from the verse: *Then he said: I am your lord, the most high* (79:24).

The polytheists saw no contradiction between something being a god and lord while it is also subject to another god and lord. This is because lordship means independence in the direction of *some* of the affairs of the universe, and this did not contradict being contingent and under the lordship of someone else. In fact, to them, every lord was subject to another lord except for God, Who is the Lord of lords and there was no lord above Him; He was the God of gods and there was no god above Him.[1]

The polytheists viewed earthly rule as a manifestation of the divine authority and power in some human being. That is why they worshipped their kings just as they worshipped their idols and lords. They had a similar view of the heads of households. Since Pharaoh was a polytheist, he worshipped his own gods; and since he was the king of the Egyptians

1 To complement the author's discussion, the only verse that talks about "Pharaoh's gods" is verse 7:127. An alternative possibility is that the verse refers to the idols and statues of him that were made and raised all over Egypt so that the people would worship him through them. There is no other evidence in the Qur'an that Pharaoh had his own gods and idols whom he used to worship. (Trans.)

(Qibṭīs), they worshipped him just as they worshipped their other gods.

That is why he was surprised when he heard from Moses and Aaron: "*Surely we are messengers from the Lord of all realms*", because it did not make sense to him. If they meant God the Necessary Being, then He was the Lord of the realm of lords, not the Lord of *all* realms. And if they meant one of their noble contingent gods—like the angels—then it would be the lord of only *one* realm of creation, not the lord of *all* realms. So he wondered: What does "Lord of all realms" mean?

That is why he asked: *And what is the Lord of all realms?* The meaning is: "What could be the reality of something described like?" He did not ask about the truth and existence of God because the polytheists already acknowledged His existence. He, like other polytheists, believed that there was no way to understand the reality of God. It would violate the foundation of their whole religion. It was on this very assumption [that God is beyond our reach] that they used to worship other gods and lords, as we said above.

He said: The Lord of the heavens and the earth and what is between them, if you were people of certitude: This is Moses' answer to "*And what is the Lord of all realms?*". What he says here is the predicate of an omitted subject [and verb]. Putting together the answer with the question, what is meant is: "He is the Lord of the heavens and the earth and what is between them. By His direction of the heavens, the earth and what is between them as a united and connected whole, He has shown that there is a Single Director and Lord for the entire universe. Those who have certitude—that is, those who pursue the path of certainty (*yaqīn*) by intellection and intuition—see this reality.

In other words: What I mean by "all realms" is the heavens, the earth and what is between them. They have a single Lord and Director because they are subject to the same command and direction. What I mean by "the Lord of all realms" is this One Lord Who is proven by these signs, and this is a certain proof that is understood by the people of certitude, who are those who have a share of intellectual argumentation and spiritual intuition.

One may object: Pharaoh asked Moses to define "the Lord of all realms" that he mentioned [in verse 26:16] and tell him its reality. It means that this term did not have an intelligible meaning to him, thus he was looking for a conceptual understanding (*taṣawwur*) of it. Now, why should

Moses say, "*if you were people of certitude*"? This condition—that is, being sure of something—is a matter of confirmation (*taṣdīq*), while the "conception" of something does not hinge on its "confirmation."

Moreover, he did not really answer Pharaoh's question, because he merely replaced the term "all realms" by "the heavens and the earth and what is between them." This is a case of defining a collection of things by naming its individual members. It is like defining "men" as "Zayd, ʿAmr, Bakr and so on." At the end of the day, this does not result in any deeper level of conception than before, nor does it result in sure belief in the matter.[1]

The answer is: Yes, there is no doubt that what Pharaoh asked for was a conceptual understanding of "the Lord of all realms." Moses replaced "all realms" with "the heavens and the earth and what is between them" because the latter expression involves a reference to the connection between the different parts of the universe, which shows that the entire universe is subject to a single order and follows the same system. Then he added the condition "*if you were people of certitude*", saying that this uniformity and connection between the parts of the universe suffices the people of certitude to confirm that there is a single director for all realms.

It is as if Pharaoh asked him: "What do you mean by the Lord of all realms?" and Moses answered: "I mean it in the sense that is understood by the people of certitude. They infer from the harmonious and connected direction in the realms of heavens, earth and what is between them, that there is a single lord and director for all realms who has no partner in his lordship of these realms. Since they confirm the existence of a single lord for all realms, they must have some conception of it, because it is impossible to believe in something without having a conception of it. This conception is what I mean."

More concisely, what he is saying is: The Lord of all realms is the One that the people of certitude have sure faith with respect to His Lordship over the heavens, the earth, and what is between them, as they look at these realms and observe their consistent order.

The idea that confirmation depends on a previous conception is the

1 "This does not result in any deeper level of conception" because it does not explain the reality and essence of the term. "Nor does it result in sure belief in the matter" because it does not involve any proof or argument that shows is truth. (Trans.)

strongest way of arguing that He can be comprehended and understood in some way and it is possible to have a correct conception of Him—even though it is impossible to comprehend His true Essence and encompass Him through knowledge.

The explanations above show the following: (1) Moses effectively referred Pharaoh to the conception and definition that the people of certitude have when they confirm God's existence. (2) The argument implied in the verse proves God's unity in lordship based on the unity of the system that directs and regulates the affairs [in all realms]. This is what is needed in arguing against the polytheists, for they believe that God has partners in lordship.

The above points clarify the implausibility of a suggested interpretation by some exegetes: Since knowing the reality of God's Essence is impossible, Moses switched from giving a real definition of God to defining Him by His attributes: *The Lord of the heavens and the earth and what is between them*. Therefore, "*if you were people of certitude*" implies that the heavens, the earth, and what is between them indicate by their origination that they have a single originator who is necessarily existent and who has no partner whatsoever in its necessity of existence.

The problem with this view is that the polytheists already admitted that it was impossible to know the reality and Essence of God, that the originator of universe was a necessarily existent that had no partner in its necessity of being, and that the other gods which control the different dimensions of the universe are all contingent beings that are created by God. Given these beliefs, the above interpretation would not be an argument against them.

(Pharaoh) said to those around him: Do you not hear? In other words: "Do you not give ear to what Moses is saying?" This rhetorical question implies surprise. He wanted the audience to listen to Moses and be surprised, because Moses first claimed to be a messenger of the Lord of all realms, but when he was asked "*what is the Lord of all realms?*" he essentially repeated the same thing again without adding anything to it.

This was a twist by Pharaoh in order to conceal the truth in Moses' explanation. Moses' point was that there is a single and uniform order in the entire universe that the people of certitude can observe; this order shows that all of the realms have a single Director and Lord, and that is Whom Pharaoh asked Moses about. However, Pharaoh interpreted his

speech as follows: He first claims "I am *the messenger from the Lord of all realms*", but when I ask him "*what is the Lord of all realms?*" he replies, "He is the Lord of all realms!"

The above shows the implausibility of how some exegetes have interpreted Pharaoh's surprise here: "I ask him about God's Essence but he answers me by mentioning His attribute." The problem with this interpretation is that Pharaoh's question was about the Essence *in the sense of* having the attribute [of being "the Lord of all realms"] as discussed above. And Moses did not interpret God's Essence by one of His attributes, but rather replaced "the Lord of all realms" (26:23) with "the Lord of the heavens and the earth and what is between them" (26:24). So he replaced "all realms" with "the heavens and the earth and what is between them." By doing so he was implying that Pharaoh did not understand the meaning of "all realms."

He said: Your Lord and the Lord of your fathers, the ancients: This is a second response by Moses to Pharaoh's question when he saw Pharaoh disguising the truth in front of the people around him. He first answered his question—*And what is the Lord of all realms?*—by interpreting "all realms" as the great realms such as "*the heavens and the earth and what is between them*". But now he turns to a more explicit interpretation and mentions God's Lordship over the realm of human beings. A realm (*ʿālam*) is a collection of people or things. The realm of humankind consists of the collection of those who are living and those who have passed away. That is why he says: *Your Lord and the Lord of your fathers, the ancients*.

What Pharaoh really wanted to do was to defend and justify himself for his claim to be a god. God's universal Lordship over all realms would negate the authority and lordship of the other lords, one of which was Pharaoh. That is why he went about denying God's Lordship over all realms in order to establish his independence. Apart from this, he saw himself to be the highest and the most important of the lords, as God relates from Him: *Then he said: I am your lord, the most high* (79:24); and: *Pharaoh said: O chiefs! I do not know of any god for you besides myself* (28:38).

It is as if Pharaoh told Moses: "If by 'the Lord of all realms' you mean God, then He is [only] the Lord of the lords but not others. And if you mean the other gods, then they are each the lord of *a specific* realm [not the lord of *all* realms]. So what does 'the Lord of all realms' mean?" Then Moses' answer can be formulated as follows: "There is only one lord in the

entire universe and that is why He can be called 'the Lord of all realms.' He is your Lord and He has sent me to you." Also, Pharaoh deceitfully implied that Moses did not really answer his question because he simply repeated himself. That is why Moses answered a second time by saying that the Lord of all realms is the Lord of the realm of human beings, including the present ones and the past. This cut off Pharaoh's scheme.

Said he: Most surely your Messenger who is sent to you is mad: This is Pharaoh's second statement in response to Moses' second answer. When he refers to Moses as a "messenger" he is essentially deriding and mocking him. "*Your* messenger" is a haughty expression, as it suggests that Pharaoh himself is too superior to have a messenger sent to him. He accused Moses of madness because of what he just said: *Your Lord and the Lord of your fathers…* (26:26).

It is as if Pharaoh is saying: "He is insane because his speech is confused, and this reveals confusion in his intellect. He first claims to be the messenger of the Lord of all realms. When he is asked what the Lord of all realms is, he first repeats the same thing with only a change of words, and then he defines it as 'your Lord and the Lord of your early fathers.'"

He said: The Lord of the east* (al-mashriq) *and the west* (al-maghrib) *and what is between them, if you understand: Given the context, apparently what is meant by the east is the direction where the sun and the other luminous celestial bodies rise, and what is meant by the west is where they set—as our senses perceive them to rise and set. What is between them would include the entire visible universe, which would be equivalent to the heavens, the earth, and what is between them.

Hence, this is reiterating the first answer with a different expression, and it includes the point about these things being subject to a single consistent system of direction and regulation. Rising and setting are interrelated, and east and west are two ends with a common middle. In this sense they are similar to the heaven and the earth, in contradistinction with each other and with a common space between the two. This uniformity necessitates a single and uniform order. Likewise, all living nations have an existential connection with their previous nations—the connection between descendants and ancestors. This shows that they are of the same kind, they are subject to the same order, and hence they have a Single Director.

Substituting "*if you were people of certitude*" in his first response with

"*if you understand*" here is an insinuation by Moses. Pharaoh derided and mocked him by saying to those around him, "*Do you not hear?*", and then accused him of insanity and nonsensical speech [in 26:27]. So here Moses replies by saying, "*if you understand*", hinting that *they* are the ones who are deprived of understanding and intellection. Otherwise, if they were people of understanding, they would have known that his first answer was not a redundant repetition, and it would have sufficed them as a proof for God's unity in Lordship. They would have realized that there is a Single Director who conducts the affairs of all realms including the heavens, the earth and what is between them. He is the only Director, and there is no Lord but Him.

Based on the above explanation, this verse—*The Lord of the east…*—is another expression of his first answer: *The Lord of the heavens and the earth and what is between them*. It is a proof for the unity of the director based on the unity of direction and order, and in turn it is a definition for "the Lord of all realms": He is the One Director Whose unity is shown by the single order that directs and conducts the entire universe. The expression in this verse is clearer [than Moses' previous answers] because the verse talks about rising and setting, which are more clearly matters of the order and direction of affairs in the universe (*tadbīr*).

Some exegetes have said that the arguments in these verses prove God as the only Essence Who is necessarily existent by-itself, and deny other partners in necessity of existence. We already discussed the implausibility of this view.[1]

***Said he: If you take a god besides me, I will most certainly make you one of the imprisoned* (al-masjūnīn):** Here Pharaoh is threatening Moses to stop advocating the lordship of "the Lord of all realms" and claiming that he is a messenger from Him. This is how all ignorant and defiant people behave: when they are overcome in an argument, they start threatening and intimidating.

"Taking a god besides him" refers to belief in the lordship of the Lord of all realms which Moses advocated. He did not explicitly say this because he did not want to utter His name. He did not mention the other gods that they worshipped [as acceptable objects of worship] due to his sense of pride and self-importance. The verse suggests that he had a law

1 See the last paragraph under the exposition of 26:24. (Trans.)

that those who rejected him and denied his divinity would be imprisoned.

Apparently the article *al-* (lit. "the") in *al-masjūnīn* is a definite article. It means: "If you persist in what you say, then I will most surely place you among those who are in my prison, and you know their severe condition and how intensely they are tortured." That is why he did not mention this in a more concise way such as: "I will most certainly imprison you."[1]

قالَ أَ وَ لَوْ جِئْتُكَ بِشَيْءٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٣٠﴾

(26:30) ***He said: What! even if I bring to you something manifest?***

The speaker here is Moses. "Something manifest" means something that would show and manifest the truth of his call. It is a sign of messengership that would verify the mission that one claims to have. There are two aspects to the prophetic message: (1) A messenger claims that he has a mission from God. (2) He preaches certain divine teachings like God's unity and the hereafter. A miracle proves the first claim, while the teachings are proven through rational arguments. This has been the case and custom for all prophets in their call, and we discussed this in the first volume of this book [volume 1 of the English translation, under verse 2:23].

The implied meaning is that Moses said: Would you still imprison me even if I bring to you something that clearly shows that my claim to messengership is true?

قالَ فَأْتِ بِهِ إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

(26:31) ***Said he: Bring it then, if you are one of the truthful ones.***

The speaker is Pharaoh. This is in response to Moses' question which implied his claim to have clear proof. That is why he adds the condition "*if you are one of the truthful ones*," meaning: if you are truthful in your claim that you have something with you.

فَأَلْقى عَصاهُ فَإِذا هِيَ ثُعْبانٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿٣٢﴾ وَ نَزَعَ يَدَهُ فَإِذا هِيَ بَيْضاءُ لِلنَّاظِرِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾

(26:32-33) ***So he cast down his rod, and lo! it was an obvious***

1 In other words, he mentioned "those who have been imprisoned" (*al-masjūnīn*) as a means of threat and intimidation. (Trans.)

serpent* (thuʿbānun mubīn)*, And he drew forth his hand, and lo! it appeared white to the onlookers.

These are the two signs that Moses was given on the night when he was chosen for messengership on Mount Ṭūr. *Thuʿbān* means "a giant snake." Its "obviousness" means that its reality was so clear that it could not be doubted. "Drawing forth his hand" refers to drawing it forth from the opening of his bosom, as mentioned in verses 27:12 and 28:32.

قالَ لِلْمَلَإِ حَوْلَهُ إِنَّ هذا لَساحِرٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٣٤﴾ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يُخْرِجَكُمْ مِنْ أَرْضِكُمْ بِسِحْرِهِ فَما ذا تَأْمُرُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(26:34-35) ***(Pharaoh) said to the chiefs around him: Most surely this is a skillful magician, Who desires to turn you out of your land with his magic; what is it then that you advise?***

The speaker is Pharaoh. He said, "*Bring it then, if you are one of the truthful ones*" (26:31), hoping that he would bring something that could be questioned or doubted. But when he brought something that could not be overlooked whatsoever, he had no recourse but to accuse him of being a skillful magician.

That is why he followed up his allegation of magic by saying: "*[He] desires to turn you out of your land with his magic*" in order to provoke them against him and persuade them to conspire with him to repel Moses in any way that they could.

…what is it then that you advise* (taʾmurūna, from amr)*? Perhaps *amr* (lit. command, order, bid) here means advising Pharaoh on how to oppose Moses. The word *amr* is used for advice, counseling and consultation because often one states his advice or counsel in imperative form. The meaning is: "Given this condition, what is your advice about how I should treat Moses so that I may implement it?" This interpretation is preferred to the common meaning of *amr* (command, order) because Pharaoh deemed himself to be their highest lord and viewed them as his slaves.

This meaning is confirmed by the fact that God used the same wording when describing what Pharaoh's chiefs said: *The chiefs of Pharaoh's people said: Most surely this is an enchanter possessed of knowledge. He intends to turn you out of your land. What counsel do you give* (mā-dhā taʾmurūnā, from amr)*?* (7:109-110), where *amr* apparently means their

advice to Pharaoh on what he should do with them.

Alternatively, it has been said that the miracles stunned and dazed him so much that he lost his pride and vanity and was overcome by helplessness. That is why he could not manage what to say and how to continue speaking.[1]

قالُوا أَرْجِهْ وَ أَخاهُ وَ ابْعَثْ فِي الْمَدائِنِ حاشِرِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾ يَأْتُوكَ بِكُلِّ سَحَّارٍ عَلِيمٍ ﴿٣٧﴾

(26:36-37) ***They said: Give him and his brother respite*** **(arjih)** ***and send heralds into the cities; That they should bring to you every skillful magician.***

The speakers in this verse are the chiefs around Pharaoh and the elite among his people. *Arjih* is an imperative form of the verb *irjāʾ*, which means "to delay." That is: Postpone Moses and his brother, give them respite and do not hasten to imprison them or take any such measure against them until you oppose their magic by a similar magic.

The word has also been recited as *arjihi* and *arjiʾhu*, which are more eloquent than the common recitation, albeit the meaning would be the same.

…and send heralds **(ḥāshirīn)** ***into the cities*** **(al-madāʾin)** ***That they should bring to you every skillful magician*** **(saḥḥār)*:*** *Madāʾin* is the plural of *madīnah*, meaning city. *Ḥāshir* is derived from *ḥashr*, which is to bring out someone to somewhere by force. That is: Send some of your officers and troops to the cities so that they may gather all skillful magicians and bring them to you, so that you can oppose these two in their magic.

They referred to these magicians as *saḥḥār* (in an exaggerated subjective form) as opposed to *sāḥir* (in the regular subjective form), to allude that there are magicians who are more adept in magic than Moses.[2]

فَجُمِعَ السَّحَرَةُ لِمِيقاتِ يَوْمٍ مَعْلُومٍ ﴿٣٨﴾

1 In other words, it could be that Pharaoh literally asked them to order and command (*amr*) him what to do because of his extent of fear and puzzlement. (Trans.)

2 This allusion is inferred from calling the magicians in the cities *saḥḥār* here, in contrast to Moses who was called a mere *sāḥir* in 26:34. (Trans.)

(26:38) ***So the magicians were gathered together at the appointed time on the fixed day:***

The "fixed day" was the "Feast Day" that Moses and Pharaoh jointly set as their tryst for the competition, as mentioned in Sūrah Ṭā-Hā.[1] This verse involves some concision and abridgement of the story there.

وَ قِيلَ لِلنَّاسِ هَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُجْتَمِعُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾ لَعَلَّنا نَتَّبِعُ السَّحَرَةَ إِنْ كانُوا هُمُ الْغالِبِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

(26:39-40) ***And it was said to the people: Will you gather? Haply we may follow the magicians, if they are the vanquishers.***

The question here is meant to encourage the people to gather.

According to *al-Kashshāf*, what is meant by "following the magicians" is following their religion, for they patently worshipped Pharaoh—as the next verses show. Their main intention was that they would not follow Moses, not that they would necessarily follow the magicians. However, they expressed their intention indirectly by saying the latter so that it would make the magicians more industrious and serious in their effort to win.

فَلَمَّا جاءَ السَّحَرَةُ قالُوا لِفِرْعَوْنَ أَ إِنَّ لَنا لَأَجْراً إِنْ كُنَّا نَحْنُ الْغالِبِينَ ﴿٤١﴾ قالَ نَعَمْ وَ إِنَّكُمْ إِذاً لَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾

(26:41-42) ***And when the magicians came, they said to Pharaoh: Shall we get a reward if we are* (in kunnā)** ***the vanquishers? He said: Yes, and surely you will then be of those who are made near.***

The question here is a request. They referred to their victory as a hypothetical possibility by using the [Arabic] particle *in* (if) instead of using *idhā* (when, once) which would have shown that they were certain of victory.[2] Below, they talk about their victory with confidence when they say: "*By Pharaoh's power, we shall most surely be victorious*" (26:44),

1 See verses 20:58-59. (Trans.)

2 The two particles *in* and *idhā* both mean "if," except that the latter is used when something is expected to happen for sure. (Trans.)

but here they say, "*if* (in) *we are the vanquishers*" as an uncertain prospect in order to motivate Pharaoh to set a reward for them. This was indeed effective, for he set a reward for them and added that he would make them among his near ones.

قالَ لَهُمْ مُوسى أَلْقُوا ما أَنْتُمْ مُلْقُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾ فَأَلْقَوْا حِبالَهُمْ وَ عِصِيَّهُمْ وَ قالُوا بِعِزَّةِ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الْغالِبُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾ فَأَلْقى مُوسى عَصاهُ فَإِذا هِيَ تَلْقَفُ ما يَأْفِكُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

(26:43-45) ***Moses said to them: Cast what you are going to cast. So they cast down their cords*** **(ḥibāluhum)** ***and their rods*** **(ʿiṣiyyuhum)** ***and said: By Pharaoh's power, we shall most surely be victorious. Then Moses cast down his staff and lo! it swallowed up*** **(talqafu, from laqf)** ***what they had faked*** **(mā yaʾfikūna).**

Hibāl is the plural of *ḥabl* (rope, cord), and *ʿiṣiyy* is the plural of *ʿaṣā* (cane, rod). *Laqf* is "to swallow hurriedly." *Yaʾfikūna* is from the root *ifk*, which is "to alter something from its real form." Magic is called *ifk* because it involves transforming something from its real form to an imaginal form. The meaning of the verses is clear.

فَأُلْقِيَ السَّحَرَةُ ساجِدِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾ قالُوا آمَنَّا بِرَبِّ الْعالَمِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾ رَبِّ مُوسى وَ هارُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

(26:46-48) ***And the magicians were thrown down prostrate; They said: We believe in the Lord of all realms: The Lord of Moses and Aaron.***

What is meant is that the magicians were puzzled and frightened by the amazing signs that they saw. As a result, they lost control of themselves and fell down in prostration to God. Therefore, being thrown down in prostration is a metaphorical way of referring to their loss of control of themselves, as if they had been flung onto the earth motionless.

They said: We believe in the Lord of all realms: This entails belief in God's unity, because, as we discussed above, viewing Him as "the Lord of all realms" necessitates believing in His unity and denying all other gods besides Him.

The Lord of Moses and Aaron: This indicates their belief in messengership in addition to their belief in monotheism.

قالَ آمَنْتُمْ لَهُ قَبْلَ أَنْ آذَنَ لَكُمْ إِنَّهُ لَكَبِيرُكُمُ الَّذِي عَلَّمَكُمُ السِّحْرَ فَلَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ لَأُقَطِّعَنَّ أَيْدِيَكُمْ وَ أَرْجُلَكُمْ مِنْ خِلافٍ وَ لَأُصَلِّبَنَّكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

(26:49) ***Said he: You believed in him before I gave you permission; most surely he is your chief who taught you magic, so you shall know: certainly I will cut off your hands and your feet on opposite sides, and certainly I will crucify you all.***

The speaker here is Pharaoh. "*Before I gave you permission*" means "without my permission." Unlike what some exegetes have said, it does not imply that his permission was a possibility or something expected. Instead, the word "before" here is like its usage in the verse: *The sea would surely be consumed before the words of my Lord are exhausted* (18:109).[1]

…most surely he is your chief who taught you magic: This is another false allegation against Moses by Pharaoh in order to turn the hearts of his [Pharaoh's] people and especially their chiefs away from him.

…so you shall know: This is a threat in vague terms, indicating that he did not need to mention it, but they soon will learn about it for themselves.

…certainly I will cut off your hands and your feet on opposite sides, and certainly I will crucify* (la-uṣallibannakum, from taṣlīb)** ***you all: Cutting off limbs "on opposite sides" means cutting the right arm and the left leg or vice versa. *Taṣlīb* means placing the victim on a cross (that is, crucifixion). We saw similar verses to these in Chapters 7 (al-Aʿrāf) and 20 (Ṭā-Hā).[2]

قالُوا لا ضَيْرَ إِنَّا إِلى رَبِّنا مُنْقَلِبُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

(26:50) ***They said: No harm* (ḍayr)*; surely to our Lord we go back.***

Ḍayr means *ḍarar* (harm, loss).

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1 That is: "The words of my Lord would never be exhausted even if seas of ink were to be consumed to record them." (Trans.)

2 See verses 7:123 and 20:71. (Trans.)

… surely to our Lord we go back: This is an explanation and justification for their claim of "no harm." The meaning is: This punishment that you threaten us with will not harm us because we will endure it and thus we will return to our Lord, and such a noble return that is.

إِنَّا نَطْمَعُ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ لَنا رَبُّنا خَطايانا أَنْ كُنَّا أَوَّلَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٥١﴾

(26:51) ***Surely we hope that our Lord will forgive us our wrongs because we are the first of the believers.***

This is a further explanation and justification for what is understood from their previous claim. It means that not only they are not afraid of death and being killed, but they are eager to meet their Lord. In other words, they said: "We are not scared of your punishment whatsoever because by it we will return to our Lord, and we are not scared of returning to Him because we hope that our Lord will forgive us our wrongs due to being the first believers in Moses and Aaron, the two messengers of our Lord."

A sound intellect would undoubtedly concur that those who open the people's way to any good would have a share of good. If God will honor a believer by forgiveness and mercy because of that person's belief, then His forgiveness and mercy certainly would not miss those who first opened this way and entered this path.

وَ أَوْحَيْنا إِلى مُوسى أَنْ أَسْرِ بِعِبادِي إِنَّكُمْ مُتَّبَعُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

(26:52) ***And We revealed to Moses: Go away with My servants travelling by night*** **(asri bi-ʿibādī),** ***surely you will be pursued.***

From this verse the second part of the story starts, which is about the punishment of Pharaoh's people for rejecting the call of Moses and Aaron. The first part was about Moses and Aaron being sent to them and calling them to monotheism. *Isrāʾ* and *sary* [the roots of the imperative *asri* in the verse] mean "to journey at night." "My servants" are the Children of Israel, and this expression is a way of honoring them [because they are being attributed to God].

…surely you will be pursued: This is an explanation and justification for the previous order. That is: "Journey with them at night so that Pharaoh's people will follow you." It shows that God had a purpose in them being pursued, for it involved a respite for the Israelites. He explicitly

mentions this in these verses: *So go forth with My servants by night; surely you will be pursued. And leave the sea intervening; surely they are a host that shall be drowned* (44:23-24).

فَأَرْسَلَ فِرْعَوْنُ فِي الْمَدائِنِ حاشِرِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾ إِنَّ هؤُلاءِ لَشِرْذِمَةٌ قَلِيلُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾ وَ إِنَّهُمْ لَنا لَغائِظُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾ وَ إِنَّا لَجَمِيعٌ حاذِرُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾ فَأَخْرَجْناهُمْ مِنْ جَنَّاتٍ وَ عُيُونٍ ﴿٥٧﴾ وَ كُنُوزٍ وَ مَقامٍ كَرِيمٍ ﴿٥٨﴾ كَذلِكَ وَ أَوْرَثْناها بَنِي إِسْرائِيلَ ﴿٥٩﴾ فَأَتْبَعُوهُمْ مُشْرِقِينَ ﴿٦٠﴾ فَلَمَّا تَراءَا الْجَمْعانِ قالَ أَصْحابُ مُوسى إِنَّا لَمُدْرَكُونَ ﴿٦١﴾ قالَ كَلاَّ إِنَّ مَعِي رَبِّي سَيَهْدِينِ ﴿٦٢﴾ فَأَوْحَيْنا إِلى مُوسى أَنِ اضْرِبْ بِعَصاكَ الْبَحْرَ فَانْفَلَقَ فَكانَ كُلُّ فِرْقٍ كَالطَّوْدِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٦٣﴾ وَ أَزْلَفْنا ثَمَّ الْآخَرِينَ ﴿٦٤﴾ وَ أَنْجَيْنا مُوسى وَ مَنْ مَعَهُ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٦٥﴾ ثُمَّ أَغْرَقْنَا الْآخَرِينَ ﴿٦٦﴾

(26:53-66) ***So Pharaoh sent heralds into the cities; Most surely these are a small company; And most surely they have enraged us; And most surely we are a vigilant multitude. So We turned them out of gardens and springs, And treasures and goodly dwellings, Even so. And We had the Children of Israel inherit them. Then they pursued them at sunrise. So when the two hosts saw each other, the companions of Moses cried out: Most surely we are being overtaken. He said: By no means; surely my Lord is with me: He will show me a way out. Then We revealed to Moses: Strike the sea with your staff. So it clove asunder, and each part was like a huge mound. And We brought near, there, the others. And We saved Moses and those with him, all of them. Then We drowned the others.***

These fourteen verses summarize the story of how Pharaoh's people were drowned and how the Israelites were rescued. Some parts of the story have been abridged as they are understood from the context. For example, the departure of Moses and Children of Israel at night is not explicitly mentioned because it is implied by: *Go away with My servants travelling by night* (26:52).

So Pharaoh sent heralds into the cities: That is: Moses set out with My servants at night, and when Pharaoh learnt about it, he sent some men as heralds to the cities under his command to gather the people and move them all.

***Most surely these are a small company* (la-shirdhimatun qalīlūn):** The heralds told the people: "*These* (that is, the Israelites) *are a small company*." *Shirdhimah* of anything is a small remnant of it. Therefore describing it as "small" (*qalīlūn*) shows further emphasis.

And most surely they have enraged us: They have done acts which have made us angry.

And most surely we are a multitude: We are gathered and in agreement with one another.

Vigilant: We are afraid lest the enemy should cause us damage or plot against us even though they are weak and small.

This was Pharaoh's message that they relayed in order to motivate the people against the Israelites.

So We turned them out of gardens and springs, And treasures and goodly dwellings, Even so* (kadhālika). *And We had the Children of Israel inherit them: These are the gardens where they had built homes and strong palaces. "*We turned them out...*" God attributes this to Himself because they were driven out by His plot and scheme, due to their pride and self-importance. *Kadhālika* here means "that was the case." "Them" in "*inherit them*" refers to the abovementioned gardens, springs, treasures and goodly dwellings.

The meaning is: The Children of Israel inherited those properties because We spared them when We drowned Pharaoh and his army.

Then they pursued them at sunrise: That is: They caught up with the Children of Israel when it was almost sunrise.

So when the two hosts saw each other, the companions of Moses cried out: Most surely we are being overtaken: That is: When the two groups approached one another and each side saw the other, the Children of Israel said fearfully, "Soon, Pharaoh's hosts will overtake us."

He said: By no means; surely my Lord is with me* (maʿīa): *He will show me a way out: That is: "Moses said: They will never overtake us." "*My Lord is with me*" refers to God's togetherness (*maʿiyyah*) in the sense of His presence as a source of protection and support. It is what his Lord ensured him when He first sent him and his brother to Pharaoh: *Surely*

I am with you both (20:46). It is not about God's togetherness as Creator and Director of affairs, because that equally applies to both Moses and Pharaoh.

He will show me a way out: that is, He will guide me to a way where Pharaoh will not reach me.

Then We revealed to Moses: Strike the sea with your staff. So it clove asunder* (fa-infalaqa, from infilāq)*, and each part was like a huge mound* (kal-ṭawd)*: *Infilāq* means *inshiqāq* (splitting, cleaving). It is when something is divided into two separate parts. "Each part" means each part of water that was divided. *Ṭawd* means a part of a mountain. After this splitting, Moses and the Israelites with him entered the way that had opened up.

And We brought near* (azlafnā)*, there, the others: *Azlafnā* is "to bring close and near." "The others" are Pharaoh and his hosts.

And We saved Moses and those with him, all of them: by keeping the sea in that shape and condition until they crossed it and left it behind.

Then We drowned the others: by pouring the sea over them while they were in the opening.

إِنَّ فِي ذٰلِكَ لَآيَةً وَ ما كانَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾

(26:67) ***Most surely there is a sign in this, but most of them were not believers.***

Given the context of these verses and the stories that follow, "this" refers to the entire story of Moses—including his formal appointment as a prophet, his message to Pharaoh and his people, and the rescue of the Israelites—up to the drowning of Pharaoh and his hosts. This entire story is a sign of God's unity in Lordship and the truth of the message [of Moses and/or the Prophet] for anyone who contemplates.

…but most of them were not believers: That is: "Most of the people in the above story were not believers despite Our clear signs." Likewise after every story in this chapter, He concludes with "*but most of them were not believers*" as the moral of the story, which connects the story to the intended audience [that is, the Prophet's nation]. It is as if it says: That was their story which involved God's signs, but most of them were not believers, just as most of your people [O Muḥammad] are not believers. Hence do not grieve over them because every nation to whom We sent a

messenger to in order to call them to God's unity in Lordship did the same.

Some exegetes have suggested that the pronoun "them" in "most of them" refers to the Prophet's people. The meaning would be: "There is a sign in this story, but most of your people do not believe in it." However, this is not the apparent interpretation of the verse.

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وَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿٦٨﴾

(26:68) ***And most surely your Lord is the Mighty, the Merciful.***

This verse was discussed above at the beginning of the chapter [26:9].

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Verses 69-104

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After finishing the story of Moses, these verses refer to Abraham's *naba'*, which means "important account." That was when he stood up for God's unity as per his pure and unadulterated *fiṭrah* (innate or primary nature, inner disposition) while his people were unanimously worshipping idols. Hence, he dissociated himself from them, defended the truth, and there happened what happened to him. In this story there is a sign, but most of his people did not believe in him, as mentioned at the end of this set of verses.

وَ اتْلُ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ إِبْراهِيمَ ﴿٦٩﴾

(26:69) ***And recite to them the story of Abraham.***

The previous story—starting with "*And when your Lord called out to Moses…*" (26:10)—differs from the current set of verses because here we read: "*recite to them.*" The purpose is to narrate Abraham's story to the Arab polytheists—predominately the Quraysh—for he was their forefather who stood up to spread monotheism and establish the true religion. None of the people at his time believed in monotheism—that "there is no god but God"—but he aided God and God aided him until monotheism was established in the Holy Land and Hijaz [that is, the Levant and the Arabian Peninsula].

Both his *fiṭrah* (innate nature) and God called him to this. The polytheists of Mecca should learn a lesson from his story and thus dissociate themselves from idolatry just as Abraham dissociated himself from idolatry, from his father and from his father's community.

إِذْ قالَ لِأَبِيهِ وَ قَوْمِهِ ما تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

(26:70) ***When he said to his father and his people: What do you worship?***

He had one discourse and debate with his father and another discourse and debate with his people, as God has recounted in Chapter 6 (al-Anʿām)

and elsewhere. However, since only a concise version of his story is presented here, the two debates are mentioned together in this verse and only the shared parts of the two are discussed.

…What do you worship? Here he asks about the reality and essence of their gods. He is putting himself in the place of one who has no clue about the reality of what they worship or its other characteristics. This is a technique in debate, where a debater wants his opponent to clearly state his stand and arguments so that he can then counter them using his own words.

Moreover, Abraham's debate was right after he left his cave and entered his father's community. Up to that day, he had not been with them to witness what they used to worship. Therefore, he argued with them based on his pure and unadulterated nature, as we discussed in detail in our exposition of Chapter 6 (al-Anʿām).[1]

قالُوا نَعْبُدُ أَصْناماً فَنَظَلُّ لَها عاكِفِينَ ﴿٧١﴾

(26:71) *They said: We worship idols, so we shall be their votaries* (fa-naẓallu lahā ʿākifīn).

Ẓalla means "to do something continuously." *ʿUkūf* regarding something means "sticking to it" and "staying with it." The letter *lām* (lit. "for") in *lahā* (lit. "for them") indicates explanation and justification for the act. That is: "We continuously adhere to these gods for their own sake." The letter *fā*ʾ (lit. "so" or "thus") shows consequence. In other words, their constant adherence to their idols was a result of their worship of those idols.

An idol (*ṣanam*) is a physical object made of metal, wood or other material in a shape that resembles the attributes of a god. The polytheists used to worship angels and the jinn, and believed them to be immaterial beings in a realm which transcends the natural world. They believed they were free from material properties and qualities. However, since it was difficult for them to turn their attention in worship to spiritual beings and comprehend them, they resorted to making physical sculptures and figures with certain forms and shapes to represent the spiritual qualities of their immaterial gods.

The same applies star-worshippers. In reality they worshipped the

1 See verses 6:74ff. (Trans.)

spirits of these celestial bodies, and the physical bodies of the stars were idols that represented those spirits. Then, since stars are not always visible and accessible, they resorted to making idols to represent the special power that each star exercises in the corporeal world under its control. For example, the active power of Venus was thought to be merriment, which was depicted in the form of a young girl. Mars was the god of bloodshed, and Mercury was in charge of knowledge and understanding. The same is true about those who worshipped idols of human saints.

Therefore, idols were adopted as mirrors reflecting the god of that idol, whether it was an angel, a jinn or a human being. However, eventually they ended up worshipping the idol itself, directing their devotional attention to it, and seeking its proximity as an ends. If they ever went beyond the idol, they would worship the god of that idol, but not God.

This explanation shows the falsity of what some have claimed: that "an idol is only a *qiblah* (direction of worship). One turns toward it only as a way of turning his attention to God; otherwise the idol is not intended per se. It is like the Kaʿbah for Muslims."

The above analogy is not accurate because when Muslims pray, they direct their *face* toward the *qiblah*, but they do not direct their *worship* toward it! The idolaters, on the other hand, used to direct *both* their face and their worship toward the idols in devotion. In other words, in the case of *qiblah*, one's face is directed toward that object, but his worship is for the sake of the Lord of the *qiblah*, that is God. However, in the case of idols, they would not only direct their faces toward the idols, but they would also worship the idols for their own sake, not for the sake of their Lord. Even if they worshipped "the lord of an idol," it was still one of the immaterial beings besides God. Either way God was not the object of their worship.

Based on the above, when they answered Abraham's question "*What do you worship?*" by saying, "*We worship idols*", they clarified that these physical objects that they worshipped represented not themselves but other beings. Then Abraham challenged them by honing in on their claim "*We worship*" because worship is applicable when something is an object of devotion by itself, not when it represents something else. This makes these idols the intended objects of worship. If that is the case, then they must exhibit what is expected and sought from worshipping, praying and supplicating to them, such as granting some benefit or deflecting some loss. However, the idols were far from understanding any request

or answering any distressed individual either by granting some benefit or removing some loss. That is why Abraham asked them: *Do they hear you when you call?...* (26:72).

قالَ هَلْ يَسْمَعُونَكُمْ إِذْ تَدْعُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾ أَوْ يَنْفَعُونَكُمْ أَوْ يَضُرُّونَ ﴿٧٣﴾

(26:72-73) ***He said: Do they hear you when you call? Or do they benefit or harm you?***

Here Abraham raises two objections to their worship of idols:

1. Worship, by nature, is a sign of the worshipper's humiliation and need toward the object of worship. The worshipper calls upon the worshipped god, which hinges on the god's knowing and hearing what it is being called for. However, idols are inanimate physical objects that have no hearing, and therefore there are no grounds for worshipping them.

2. People worship a god either because they hope to gain some good and benefit from it, or because they want to protect themselves against its evil and harm. However, idols are inanimate physical objects that are incapable of either bringing about a benefit or averting a loss.

Each of these two verses presents one part of his objection. He mentions them in the form of a rhetorical question so that they would acknowledge these things themselves.

قالُوا بَلْ وَجَدْنا آباءَنا كَذلِكَ يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٧٤﴾

(26:74) ***They said: Nay, we found our fathers doing so.***

It behooved them to answer Abraham's questions by simply saying "no," but that would have defeated their belief in idolatry. That is why they switched to something else and took recourse to the argument that they were simply being followers. In other words, they presented no evidence that they should worship idols other than the fact that they were blindly following their forefathers.

...we found our fathers doing so. That is: We found them doing so and therefore we also did as they did and worshipped what they worshipped. The verse does not say, "We found our fathers worshipping them" or something like that, but it simply says, "We found them *doing so*" in order to more clearly show their blind following (*taqlīd*). It is as if they did not know anything about these acts of worship except that they were actions like the actions of their fathers; they had no understanding of what was

beyond these apparent forms and representations.

قالَ أَ فَرَأَيْتُمْ ما كُنْتُمْ تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾ أَنْتُمْ وَ آباؤُكُمُ الْأَقْدَمُونَ ﴿٧٦﴾ فَإِنَّهُمْ عَدُوٌّ لِي إِلاَّ رَبَّ الْعالَمِينَ ﴿٧٧﴾

(26:75-77) ***He said: Have you then considered what you have been worshipping: You and your ancient fathers. Surely they are enemies to me, but not the Lord of the worlds.***

Here Abraham dissociates himself from them, their gods, and their fathers by saying: *Have you then considered…* He said this when his debate with his father and his people got to a point where it became clear that they had no argument for worshipping idols except blindly following their fathers.

The word "then" in "*Have you then considered*" (the letter *fā*ʾ in Arabic) indicates consequence, showing that what he is saying is based on the previous verses. In other words: "You have no proof for worshipping idols except blind following; hence, this worship is completely false, void and baseless. Since this worship is void and you have no proof for it other than following your fathers, these very idols that you see—that is, these very objects that you and your forefathers worship—are my enemies. They are nothing but enemies to me because worshipping them is only a harm to my religion and a detriment to my soul."

He mentions their ancient fathers to show that blind following is not proof for him as it is to them; that he does not respect this practice merely because it has a long history; and that temporal precedence has no impact in making falsehood truth, or making truth falsehood.

Surely they are* (innahum) *enemies to me, but not the Lord of the worlds: The pronoun "they" (in *innahum*) is used for intelligent beings. Here it is applied to the idols because they were objects of worship, which necessitates intelligence and understanding. Such usage is found frequently in the Qur'an.[1]

His exclusion "*but not the Lord of the worlds*" is a disconnected exception (*al-istithnāʾ al-munqaṭiʿ*) from "*Surely they are enemies to me*." That

1 In other words, they are referred to as intelligent beings because they are treated as such by the audience. (Trans.)

is: The idols are enemies to me, but the Lord of the worlds is not so.[1]

الَّذِی خَلَقَنِی فَهُوَ یَهْدِینِ ﴿۷۸﴾ وَ الَّذِی هُوَ یُطْعِمُنِی وَ یَسْقِینِ ﴿۷۹﴾ وَ إِذا
مَرِضْتُ فَهُوَ یَشْفِینِ ﴿۸۰﴾ وَ الَّذِی یُمِیتُنِی ثُمَّ یُحْیِینِ ﴿۸۱﴾

(26:78-81) *Who created me, so He shows me the way: And He Who gives me food and drink: And when I am sick, He heals me. And He Who will cause me to die, then give me life.*

In the last verse he [Abraham] excepted the Lord of the worlds from being an enemy. Here he continues that by describing Him by attributes which show that not only is He not his enemy, but He is rather Compassionate and Caring toward him, has blessed him with every form of good, and protects him from every evil. He starts this by saying: *Who created me…*

Some exegetes have suggested that these verses are a new course of discussion, but that is not the case.

Who created me, so He shows me the way: He begins by discussing his creation [by God] in order to show that God is the One Who is in charge of his affairs. This intended conclusion is found directly in the claim, "He has created me." The proof for why the direction of his affairs are in the hands of God is that his creation and existence are from God, because creation and direction of affairs are inseparable. This is evident in material beings that gradually come to existence and perfect their being. Therefore it does not make sense for them to be created by someone but directed by someone else. Since creation and origination are from God, direction of affairs is also by Him. It is for the same reason that he then says, "*So He shows me the way*," where the letter *fā*ʾ (lit. "so" or "then") shows that God's guidance is subsequent to His creation. That is, He is a Guide *because* He is a Creator.

Apparently "showing the way" here is meant in an absolute sense, including the way to both worldly and otherworldly benefits. It is expressed in present tense (*yahdīni*) which indicates an ongoing and continuous act. The implied meaning is: He is the One Who has created me, has ever

1 In other words, "*the Lord of the worlds*" is not a member of "they" in "*Surely they are*" to begin with. Hence, the first and second parts of the verse are two independent statements, not a continuous or connected exception. (Trans.)

guided me to what is good in life, and will always do so.

Hence, this verse is equivalent to what God relates from Moses where he says to Pharaoh: *Our Lord is He Who gave to everything its creation, then guided it (to its goal)* (20:50). That is: He guided it to what is beneficial for it, which refers to God's universal guidance [of all existential beings toward their perfection].

The same idea was hinted at early in this chapter where He says: *And do they not look at the earth, how many of every noble species We have caused to grow in it? Most surely there is a sign in that* (26:7-8). We discussed the implied argument in these verses above.

Based on this, the qualities that he mentions—"*And He Who gives me food…*"—are a list of specific examples of the same general idea, because they are all instances of God's universal guidance (*al-hidāyat al-ʿāmmah*); some of them are worldly benefits, and some of them are otherworldly benefits.

It could also be that guidance in this verse [26:78] only refers to religious guidance in particular. In that case, the following qualities have their own account, and the mention of guidance right after creation and before the other bounties and blessings is because it is the greatest blessing after existence.

And He Who* (alladhī) *gives me food and drink: And when I am sick, He heals me. This is a metaphorical way of referring to all material bounties that God has provided to fulfill his inadequacies and remove his needs in this world. The items that are specifically mentioned are the most important of these blessings: food, drink and healing.

Therefore, "*when I am sick*" is stated to prepare the grounds for talking about healing. Otherwise, the verses are essentially saying: "He gives me food and drink, and He heals me." That is why he ascribes sickness to himself, for his point is to list God's bounties while sickness is a loss of bounty. Some exegetes have said that it was Abraham's courtesy in speech to ascribe sickness to himself even though that is also from God. However, this interpretation is not correct.

He repeats "He Who" (*alladhī*) instead of simply adding these to "*Who created me, so He shows me the way*" (26:78) in order to show that each of these qualities that are mentioned in these verse is a proof for God being the Lord Who directs his affairs, watches over him, and answers his calls.

And He Who will cause me to die, then give me life: This refers to the

death that is prescribed for every soul, as mentioned in the verse: *Every soul must taste death* (21:35). Death does not mean extinction or annihilation, but rather a transition from one abode to another, which makes it a part of how things are directed in the universe.[1] "Giving life" means "bestowing life after death."

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وَ الَّذِی أَطْمَعُ أَنْ یَغْفِرَ لِی خَطِیئَتِی یَوْمَ الدِّینِ ﴿۸۲﴾

(26:82) *And Who, I hope, will forgive me my mistakes on the Day of Judgment* (yawm al-dīn).

Yawm al-dīn means "the day of recompense and retribution," which is the Day of Resurrection. He does not talk about forgiveness as something certain, unlike the previous points, because no one is entitled to God's forgiveness. Rather, it is a matter of God's munificence. Of course, no one is entitled to receive anything from God, except that He has took it on Himself to guide and provide for every soul, and to make them die and bring them back to life, but He has not decreed in like manner that every sinner shall be forgiven. About the first few points, He says: *And by the Lord of the heavens and the earth! it is most surely the truth* (51:23), *Every soul must taste death* (35:21), and: *To Him is your return, of all (of you); the promise of Allah (made) in truth* (10:4); but about forgiveness He says: *Surely Allah does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and He forgives what is besides this to whom He pleases* (4:48, 4:116).

He ascribed mistakes to himself even though he was an infallible prophet. This shows that what is meant by "mistake" here is not transgressing God's authoritative commands (*al-amr al-mawlawī*). Instead, mistakes and sins have their own degrees according to a servant's level of servitude; as it is said, "The good deeds by the pious are evil deeds for the intimates" (*ḥasanāt al-abrār sayyiʾāt al-muqarrabīn*) and as He tells His Prophet: *And ask forgiveness for your sin* (40:55).

Mistakes to people like Abraham would be like the times when he was not fully engaged in the pure remembrance of God due to the necessities of life such as sleeping, eating, and drinking—even though from another angle, these are also acts of obedience. How could it be otherwise while God has explicitly stated that he was purely dedicated to God without

1 In other words, attributing his death to God does not contravene the purpose of these verses, which is to list God's bounties in directing his affairs. (Trans.)

associating anything else with Him: *Surely We purified them by a pure quality, the keeping in mind of the (final) abode* (38:46)? We had a discussion related to the current topic at the end of volume 6 [volume 12 of the English translation, under verses 5:116-120] and under Abraham's story in volume 7 [volume 13 of the English translation, under verses 6:64-83].

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رَبِّ هَبْ لِي حُكْماً وَ أَلْحِقْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ ﴿٨٣﴾

(26:83) ***My Lord: Grant me judgment, and join me with the good.***

In the previous verses Abraham referred to the continuous, successive and abundant bounties of his Lord upon himself starting from his creation and continuing to eternity. Since he depicted the encompassment and comprehensiveness of God's favor and kindness, he was drawn in by God's pull of mercy to express his indigence as a servant, and was thus impelled to state his needs and requests. That is why in this verse he switches from third person to second person and asks these things.

Even though he describes God as "the Lord of the worlds" (26:77) above, here he ascribes Him to himself: "My Lord!" This is to arouse God's mercy to answer his call and call the Lord's care to grant his request.

…Grant me judgment* (ḥukman)*: *Ḥukm* here has the same meaning as in Moses' speech: *Then my Lord granted me judgment* (ḥukman) (26:21). As we said above, it means having an accurate understanding and opinion in terms of beliefs and what is right to do, as well as acting according to it. It consists of two forms of revelation:

(1) Revelation of true beliefs and righteous deeds, which can be summarized as *tawḥīd* (monotheism) and *taqwā* (self-restraint, Godwariness). This is found in the verse: *And We did not send before you any messenger but We revealed to him that there is no god but Me; therefore, serve Me* (21:25).

(2) Strengthening and grounding revelation that guides a person to righteousness in practice. This is seen in the verse: *And We made them Imams who guided (people) by Our command, and We revealed to them the doing of good and the keeping up of prayer and the giving of the alms, and Us (alone) did they serve* (21:73)

Ḥukman here is in the indefinite form (*nakirah*), which shows exaltation and emphasis.

…and join me with the good* (bil-ṣāliḥīn, from ṣalāḥ)*: According to

al-Rāghib, *ṣalāḥ* is the opposite of *fasād* (corruption, decay, rot, disorder, mischief), which is a change from what the original nature of something necessitates. Therefore, *ṣalāḥ* is when something remains according to the necessities, requirements and implications of its original nature, which gives rise to the good results and benefits that are expected from it, without any decay that would prevent those desired effects.

Here it simply says *ṣāliḥīn* (the good), without tying it to action [that is, it says "those who are good" not "those who do good deeds"]. Therefore what is meant here are those who have a good essence, not those who are good-doers only in action, notwithstanding that having a good essence is not separable from doing good deeds. He says: *And as for the good land, its vegetation springs forth (abundantly) by the permission of its Lord* (7:58).[1]

The goodness of essence is when a being is at full potential to receive God's mercy and every good and felicity that it can receive, without being mixed with any false belief or evil act that would corrupt it. This shows that essential good is an implication of the bestowal of *ḥukm* (judgment) as defined above, albeit *ḥukm* is more specific in this context than *ṣalāḥ*, and that is evident.

Hence, his request of being joined with the good results from being given judgment and is a necessary consequence of it. Thus, "*My Lord: Grant me judgment, and join me with the good*" (26:83) is equivalent to saying: "My Lord: Grant me judgment and bring to fruition its effect, which is essential goodness."

We had a discussion in exposition of: "*And in the hereafter he is most surely among the good* (al-ṣāliḥīn)" (2:130) in volume 1 [volume 2 of the English translation] that relates to our discussion here.

وَ اجْعَلْ لِي لِسانَ صِدْقٍ فِي الْآخِرِينَ ﴿٨٤﴾

(26:84) *And ordain for me a tongue of truthfulness* (lisānan ṣidqin) *among posterity.*

In the expression "tongue of truthfulness," tongue is added to truthfulness as a possessive addition, meaning a tongue that exclusively belongs to the truth, such that it does not speak anything other than the truth.

1 In other words, goodness of essence is a higher level than goodness of deeds. One who does good deeds may not have necessarily reached the level of good essence, but one with a good essence certainly does good deeds. (Trans.)

Apparently ordaining such a tongue for him means ordaining a tongue [among the future generations] like his own tongue: a tongue that only speaks what he truly holds within. Thus, this request boils down to asking God to raise someone among posterity who would stand up for his call and call the people to his religion, that is, the religion of monotheism.

Based on the above, this verse is equivalent to what He says after describing Abraham in Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt: *And We perpetuated (praise) to him among the later generations* (37:108). He has also said this sentence [in the same chapter] after the description of a group of other prophets including Noah, Moses, Aaron, Elijah (Ilyās). Likewise He says in Sūrah Maryam after talking about Zechariah, John, Jesus, Abraham, Moses and Aaron: *And We left (behind them) a truthful mention of eminence for them* (19:50).[1] At any rate, what is meant is the continuation of their call after their death by appointing messengers like themselves.

Some have said that is means the messengership of the Prophet, as per his hadith: "I am what my father Abraham asked for." This is confirmed by the description of his religion in several places in the Qur'an as "Abraham's religion" (*millata Ibrāhīm*). Based on this, the verse would effectively go back to what God narrates from Abraham and Ishmael when they were building the Kaʿbah: *Our Lord! and raise up in them a Messenger from among them who shall recite to them Thy communications and teach them the Book and the wisdom, and purify them* (2:129).

Some exegetes have said that Abraham asked God to be praised and remembered with good reputation until the Day of Resurrection. God indeed granted his supplication, for the followers of all [Abrahamic] religions praise him and remember him in a good way.

However, interpreting "tongue of truthfulness" as "good remembrance" (*al-dhikr al-jamīl*) is not easily inferred from the text. The same applies to matching this request with the supplication narrated from him in Chapter 2 (al-Baqarah). They are not the apparent meanings of "tongue of truthfulness."

وَ اجْعَلْنِي مِنْ وَرَثَةِ جَنَّةِ النَّعِيمِ ﴿٨٥﴾

(26:85) ***And make me of the inheritors of the garden of bliss.***

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1 The verse is after talking about Zechariah, John, Mary, Jesus and Abraham, but before talking about Moses and Aaron. (Trans.)

The meaning of inheriting the Garden (that is, Paradise) was discussed in the exposition of: *These are they who are the inheritors* (23:10).

وَ اغْفِرْ لِأَبِي إِنَّهُ كانَ مِنَ الضَّالِّينَ ﴿٨٦﴾

(26:86) ***And forgive my father, for surely he was* (kāna) *of those who have gone astray;***

Here he asks for forgiveness for his father, as per his promise: *Peace be on you, I will pray to my Lord to forgive you* (19:47). It can be argued that he made this supplication while his father was still alive, as per the verse: *And Abraham only asked forgiveness for his father because of a promise which he had made to him; but when it became clear to him that he was an enemy of Allah, he declared himself to be clear of him* (9:114). Therefore, the use of the past tense verb *kāna* (lit. "was") in "*surely he was* (kāna) *of those who have gone astray*" could refer to his father being misguided some time before the time of this supplication.[1]

وَ لا تُخْزِنِي يَوْمَ يُبْعَثُونَ ﴿٨٧﴾ يَوْمَ لا يَنْفَعُ مالٌ وَ لا بَنُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾ إِلاَّ مَنْ أَتَى اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ ﴿٨٩﴾

(26:87-89) ***And disgrace me not (lā tukhzinī, from khizy) on the day when they are raised. The day on which property will not avail, nor sons. Except for one who comes to Allah with a sound heart (from evil).***

Khizy means "being not supported by one who is expected to support." The pronoun "they" [in verse 26:87] refers to the people, and there is no problem in using a pronoun without mentioning its antecedent when it is understood.

His request to not be let down on the Day of Resurrection shows that one needs God's support on that day, because this weak body cannot bear the dreadful events that it will face on the Day of Resurrection except through His aid and support.

The day on which property will not avail, nor sons: This is in apposition to "*the day when they are raised*" (26:87), as opposed to the claim of

1 In other words, the past tense does not necessarily indicate that his father was dead when he made this supplication. (Trans.)

some exegetes that Abraham finished his speech in the last verse, and the next fifteen verses are God's speech.

This verse negates the benefit of wealth and children on the Day of Resurrection. Although wealth and children are a basis of mutual help and support in this world, this relationship is only a matter of mental construct and social convention which has no impact beyond the boundaries of social life. The Day of Resurrection is a day of unveiling realities and severing ties; thus neither wealth nor children will avail people on the account of being one's property or kin. He says: *And certainly you have come to Us alone as We created you at first, and you have left behind your backs the things which We gave you* (6:94), and: *So when the trumpet is blown, there shall be no ties of relationship between them on that day, nor shall they ask of each other* (23:101).

So what is meant here by negating the availing of property and children on the Day of Resurrection is the negation of their conventionally established causality and impact in human societies in this world. In our societies, wealth is a very good means and instrument to achieve one's objective in life. Similarly, children are very good means to power, might, victory and honor.[1] Wealth and children are the main means that one predominately relies on in the life of this world. Hence, negating their benefit is a way of negating the benefit and impact of any conventionally established means in human societies that is used to acquire worldly benefits such as knowledge, skill, or beauty.

In other words, negating them is equivalent to saying that social institutions with their conventionally established means will fall and disappear, as hinted at by the verse: *What is the matter with you that you do not help each other? Nay! on that day they shall be submissive* (37:25-26).

***Except for one who comes to Allah with a sound heart (from evil)* (qalbin salīm, from silm):** Al-Rāghib says, "*Silm* and *salāmah* mean being free and exempt from outward and inward defects." Given the context of the verses, Abraham's purpose here is to provide an exhaustive description that would distinguish that day from the other days [that is, this life]. He first asked his Lord to help him and not let him down on the day when things that are useful in this world—including property and children—are of no avail. This prepared the ground for saying what would be helpful

1 "Children" in these contexts would be equivalent to "power" or "connections" in our day and age. (Trans.)

on that day, which he identifies as bringing a sound heart: *Except for one who comes to Allah with a sound heart (from evil)*.

Therefore the exception here is a disconnected one, meaning: "However, one who comes to God with a sound heart will be availed by it." Overall, the message here is that soundness of the heart is the criterion for success on that day, regardless of whether or not a person had possessions and children in this world.

Some exegetes have said that the exception here is a connected one, where what is being excepted from is omitted. The implied meaning is: The day on which neither property nor children will avail anyone except for one who comes to God with a sound heart.

Some have said: It is a connected exception, and what is being excepted from is "the possessor" [of property and children] which is omitted. The implied meaning is: No one's property or children will be of any avail except for one who comes to God with a sound heart.

Some have said: "Property and children effectively mean *ghinā* (wealth, solvency, richness), and the exception is an exception of the possessor of the same kind [that is, of *ghinā*] which is omitted. The implied meaning is: The day on which no riches will avail except the riches of one who comes to God with a sound heart. The soundness of heart is a form of *ghinā* and therefore the exception is a connected one." However, this is an unwarranted claim.

Some have said: The exception is a disconnected one and the verses involve an omitted annexed noun (*muḍāf*). The implied meaning is: No property or children will avail, except for the state (*hāl*) of one who comes to God with a sound heart [where "state" is the omitted annexed noun].

The first three suggested interpretations [where the exception is interpreted as a connected one] imply that the verses are only about the possessors of property and children, because they effectively say: "That is a day when wealth and children will not avail their owners unless those owners of wealth and children have a sound heart." This means that the verses are silent about those who do not possess wealth or children, which is not supported by the context. As with the fourth [and last] interpretation, it assumes an omission while there is no need for it.

These verses are similar in meaning to: *Wealth and children are an adornment of the life of this world; and the ever-abiding, the good works, are better with your Lord in reward and better in expectation* (18:46). The

difference is that the verses here attribute benefit to a sound heart, which means a soul that is free from the flaw of iniquity (*ẓulm*), including polytheism and sins. God describes that day as follows: *And the faces shall be humbled before the Living, the Self-subsistent God, and he who bears iniquity is indeed a failure* (20:111).

Some exegetes have said: These two verses confirm that his asking of forgiveness for his father was essentially praying that he would be guided to faith, because asking forgiveness for one who has died in a state of unbelief could not possibly avail him as that would be a case of intercession [and intercession does not apply to unbelievers].

This implies that the exception here is a connected one—as this exegete has claimed—and it is based on Abraham being the biological son of Āzar.[1] However, we discussed the falsity of this view in his story in Chapter 6 (al-Anʿām)[2] and showed that the verses of the Qur'an explicitly refute this.

However, if we take the exception to be a disconnected one, then we can add this verse—*Except for one who comes to Allah with a sound heart (from evil)* (26:89)—to the verse, *And they do not intercede except for him whom He approves* (21:28) and infer that his asking of forgiveness was before his father's death. That is evident.[3]

وَ أُزْلِفَتِ الْجَنَّةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٩٠﴾ وَ بُرِّزَتِ الْجَحِيمُ لِلْغاوِينَ ﴿٩١﴾

(26:90-91) *And the garden shall be brought near* (uzlifat, from izlāf) *for those who guard (against evil), And hell shall be made manifest* (burrizat, from tabrīz) *to the deviators.*

Izlāf means "to bring something close." *Tabrīz* is "to show, manifest,

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1 In other words, the suggested interpretation is saying: Abraham was the real son of Āzar, and here he is acknowledging that on the Day of Resurrection he cannot avail his father—that is, he cannot intercede for him—unless he comes there with a sound heart. Therefore he must have been asking for Āzar's forgiveness *before* his death, when he still had the chance to believe and acquire a sound heart. (Trans.)

2 See verses 6:74-83. (Trans.)

3 Here the author is essentially modifying the suggested interpretation above by saying that Āzar need not be Abraham's real father in order to benefit from his intercession, but he needs to be approved by God; that is, have an approved religion, which is a sound heart. (Trans.)

disclose." The contrast between the *muttaqīn* (the self-restrained, the Godwary) and the deviators, and the descriptions of the two groups given here allude to what God decreed when He expelled Iblīs (Satan) upon his refusal to prostrate to Adam, as seen in Sūrah al-Ḥijr: *Surely as regards My servants, you have no authority over them except those deviators who follow you. And surely Hell is the promised place of them all… Surely those who guard (against evil) shall be in the midst of gardens and fountains* (15:42-45).

وَ قِيلَ لَهُمْ أَيْنَ ما كُنْتُمْ تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٩٢﴾ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ هَلْ يَنْصُرُونَكُمْ أَوْ يَنْتَصِرُونَ﴿٩٣﴾

(26:92-93) *And it shall be said to them: Where are those that you used to worship; Besides Allah? Can they help you or yet help themselves?*

That is: Can they deflect wretchedness and punishment from you or from themselves? Overall, it will become evident to them that they went astray in worshipping other than God.

فَكُبْكِبُوا فِيها هُمْ وَ الْغاوُونَ ﴿٩٤﴾ وَ جُنُودُ إِبْلِيسَ أَجْمَعُونَ ﴿٩٥﴾

(26:94-95) *So they shall be thrown down* (kubkibū) *into it, they and the deviators, And the hosts of Satan, all.*

It is said that *kabbahu* and *inkabba* are used when someone is thrown down on his face. *Kabkabahu* means "he threw him down on his face over and over again." It implies a recurrence of *kabb*, just like *dabba* vs. *dabdaba* (crawl), *dhabba* vs. *dhabdhaba* (protect, thwart), *zalla* vs. *zalzala* (slip, shake), and *dakka* vs. *dakdaka* (ruin, obliterate).

The plural pronoun "they" refers to the idols, as seen in: *Surely you and what you worship besides Allah are the firewood of hell* (21:98). The idols are one of the three groups mentioned in these verses that will be thrown in hell. The second group is the deviators who are destined to hell as per the verse in Sūrah al-Ḥijr quoted above [15:42-43]. The third group is the hosts of Satan, who are the associates of the devils who, according to the Qur'an, do not leave the deviators until they enter the Fire. He says: *And whoever turns himself away from the remembrance of the Beneficent God, We appoint for him a devil, so he becomes his associate… And since you were unjust, it will not profit you this day that you are sharers in the*

chastisement (43:36, 43:39).

قالُوا وَ هُمْ فِيها يَخْتَصِمُونَ ﴿٩٦﴾ تَاللَّهِ إِنْ كُنَّا لَفِي ضَلالٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٩٧﴾ إِذْ نُسَوِّيكُمْ بِرَبِّ الْعالَمِينَ ﴿٩٨﴾ وَ ما أَضَلَّنا إِلاَّ الْمُجْرِمُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾

(26:96-99) ***They shall say while they contend therein: By Allah! we were certainly in manifest error, When we made you equal to the Lord of the worlds; And none but the guilty led us astray.***

Apparently the deviators are speaking with themselves here. The deviators and the devils quarrel with one another, as God has mentioned in other places in His Book.

By Allah! we were certainly in manifest error: This is their confession to their error.

When we made you equal to the Lord of the worlds: The addressees in this verse could be: (1) the idols that they used to worship; (2) the idols and the devils; (3) the idols, the devils and the chief leaders of deviation whom they used to follow. The best possibility is the first one.

And none but the guilty led us astray: Apparently the speakers there mean someone other than themselves when they say, "the guilty" (*al-mujrimūn*). Some possible examples are:

- a leader of misguidance whom they followed in this world;
- a person who called them toward polytheism and thus they followed;

their fathers who were polytheists and whom they followed in polytheism;

- a friend whom they emulated.

Given the verses about the Resurrection, "the guilty" are those whose guilt is proven on that day and are thus sentenced to the Fire. He says: *And get aside today, O guilty ones* (36:59).

فَما لَنا مِنْ شافِعِينَ ﴿١٠٠﴾ وَ لا صَدِيقٍ حَمِيمٍ ﴿١٠١﴾

(26:100-101) ***So we have no intercessors, Nor a true friend* (ṣadīqin ḥamīm)*;***

According to al-Rāghib, *ḥamīm* means "close and compassionate." These two verses are their expression of regret for being deprived of the intercession of the intercessors and the help of their friends. The statement "*So we have no intercessors*" (26:100) implies that there will be intercessors

on that day who will intercede for some sinners. Otherwise they should have said, "So we have no intercessor" because there would have been no need to use a plural.[1] It has been narrated that they will say this when they see the interceding of the angels, the prophets and the believers.

فَلَوْ أَنَّ لَنا كَرَّةً فَنَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٠٢﴾

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(26:102) ***But if we could but once return, we would be of the believers.***

This is their wish: to return to this world in order to be believers so that they may attain the felicity that the believers attain.

إِنَّ فِي ذٰلِكَ لَآيَةً وَ ما كانَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٠٣﴾ وَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٠٤﴾

(26:103-104) ***Most surely there is a sign in this, but most of them were not believers. And most surely your Lord is the Mighty, the Merciful.***

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"In this" refers to Abraham's story, his commitment to monotheism according to his unadulterated *fiṭrah* (innate nature), his focus on the Lord of the worlds, his dissociation from the idols, and his debate with the polytheists and idolaters. In all of these there is a sign for whoever contemplates them. There are also signs for those who are possessed of intellect in his other stories, tribulations and hardships that are not mentioned here, such as being thrown in fire, receiving angels as guests, settling Ishmael and his mother in the land of Mecca, building the Kaʿbah, and sacrificing Ishmael.

…but most of them were not believers: "*Most of them*" means "most of Abraham's people." The rest of the meaning is clear based on our exposition above.

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1 This is a matter of Arabic language. To capture this point in English, the verse could be translated as, "So we do not have any of the intercessors" which would clearly imply that there are indeed some intercessors. The singular case corresponding to a case of no intercessors on that day whatsoever would be: "So we do not have any intercessor." (Trans.)

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning verse 26:84 (*And ordain for me a tongue of truthfulness* (lisāna ṣidqin) *among posterity*) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: That is the Commander of the Faithful [that is, Imam ʿAlī].

Author's comment: This could be either the interpretation of the verse or an application of it.

(2) Imam al-Ṣādiq narrated from Imam ʿAlī: A tongue of truthfulness that God assigns someone among the people is better than a wealth that he consumes and leaves in inheritance…[1]

(3) Qatādah said, in explaining the verse "*And disgrace me not on the day when they are raised*" (26:87): We have been told that the Prophet of God said: "On the Day of Resurrection a man who was a believer will come holding the hand of his father who was a polytheist, but the Fire will seize him [the father] even though his son was hoping to make him enter Paradise. A caller will call out, 'No polytheist shall enter Paradise.' The man will say, 'My Lord! This is my father, and You promised not to disgrace me!' The man will continue to cling to his father until God transforms him into a hyena with an evil shape and a foul smell. When the man sees him like that he will dissociate himself from him and say, 'You are not my father.'" He [Qatādah] added: We understood this to be Abraham although his name was not mentioned then.[2]

(4) The Prophet said: Abraham will meet his father Āzar on the Day of Resurrection while there is dust and darkness [of disgrace] on Āzar's face. Abraham will tell him, "Did I not tell you not to disobey me?" His father will respond, "I shall not disobey you today." So Abraham will supplicate, "My Lord, You promised me not to disgrace me when they are raised. What disgrace is greater than having such a father who is so far [from salvation]?" God will say, "Indeed I have made Paradise forbidden for the unbelievers."

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Yaḥyā.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, under verse 26:86 (*And forgive my father*), on the authority of ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd, Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

Then he will be told, "O Abraham! What is below your feet?" And suddenly he will find a hyena that is defiled [in dust or filth]. It will then be grabbed by its feet and flung into the Fire.[1]

Author's comment: The last two narrations are based on Abraham being Āzar's real and biological son. However, as we discussed in the story of Abraham in Sūrah al-Anʿam, these narrations contradict the Qur'an's explicit refutation of this view.

(5) Imam al-Ṣādiq was once asked about the verse: *Except for one who comes to Allah with a sound heart* (26:89). He said: "A sound heart is that which meets his Lord while there is no one else in it." He then continued: "Any heart in which there is some partner [for God] or doubt, shall fail. The reason why they [that is, God and His prophets and saints] have emphasized *zuhd* (disinterestedness, renunciation) with regard to this world is so that the hearts of the people may be freed and fully turned toward the hereafter."[2]

(6) Similarly, *Majmaʿ al-bayān* narrates from Imam al-Ṣādiq: "That is a heart that is exempt from the love of this world." Then it adds: This is confirmed by the Prophet's words, "The love of this world is the root of every evil."

(7) Imam al-Bāqir said : *And the hosts of Satan, all* (26:95): The hosts of Satan are the devils descended from him… *And none but the guilty led us astray* (26:99): That is by calling us to their way. This is the same as God's description of them when He will muster them toward the Fire: *The last of them shall say with regard to the first of them: Our Lord! They led us astray; therefore, give them a double chastisement of the Fire* (7:38), and: *Whenever a nation shall enter, it shall curse its sister, until when they have all come up with one another into it* (7:38). They will disassociate themselves from one another and curse one another. Each group would want to accuse and condemn another so that they may be saved and

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Bukhārī and al-Nasāʾī, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Sufyān b. ʿUyaynah.

delivered from the immense calamity that has befallen them. However, it is no longer a time of test and trial, neither will any excuse be accepted, nor is there any chance of salvation.[1]

(8) Concerning "*So they shall be thrown down into it, they and the deviators*" (al-ghāwūn) (26:94) Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq said: They [that is, *al-ghāwūn*] are those who advocated justice by their tongue but then deviated to something else.[2]

Author's comment: The same idea has been narrated by al-Qummī in his *Tafsīr* and by al-Barqī in *al-Maḥāsin*, from Imam al-Ṣādiq (as.). However, apparently the Imam said this about the verse, "*And as for the poets, the deviators* (al-ghāwūn) *follow them*" (26:224) because it then says: "*And that they say that which they do not do*" (26:226). Therefore it has been mistakenly reported under verse 26:94 (*So they shall be thrown down into it…*). This is evident to anyone who contemplates it.

(9) The Prophet said: Some people in Paradise will ask, "What happened to my friend?" while their friend is in hell. So God will say, "Bring out his friend and take him to Paradise." Then those who remain in the Fire will say: *So we have no intercessors, nor a true friend* (26:100-101).[3]

(10) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "By God we shall intercede for our followers (*shīʿa*)"—repeating it thrice—"to a point where the people will say: *So we have no intercessors, nor a true friend; but if we could but once return, we would be of the believers* (26:100-102)." Another narration says: "to a point where our enemy will say…"[4]

(11) Concerning verse 26:102 (*But if we could but once return, we would be of the believers*) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: "It means [we would be]

1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Sālim, as a part of a longer hadith.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via two chains of narration, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, reported as a part of a hadith narrated by Jābir b. ʿAbd-Allāh.

4 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ḥumrān b. Aʿyan.

of the guided ones." Then he added: "This is because they will already have belief at that time because of their confession."

Authors' comment: What the Imam means is that they will have belief in the sense of certainty; however they will realize that this belief is not beneficial for them on that day. Instead, beneficial belief is to believe while they live in this world. That is why they will wish to return to this world so that they may have the same type of belief as the guided ones who are the real believers. They will be guided by their belief on the Day of Resurrection.[1] This is a subtle meaning and it is confirmed by His words: *And could you but see when the guilty shall hang down their heads before their Lord: Our Lord! we have seen and we have heard; therefore, send us back, we will do good; surely (now) we are certain* (32:12). They will not say, "Send us back so that we may *believe and do good*," but they will say, "Send us back so that we may *do good*." Contemplate this.

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1 Being guided by their belief on that day is confirmed by this verse: *Surely (as for) those who believe and do good, their Lord will guide them by their faith; there shall flow from beneath them rivers in gardens of bliss* (10:9). (Trans.)

Verses 105-122

After finishing the accounts of Moses and Abraham—who were among the Resolute Prophets (*ūlū al-ʿazm*)—these verses mention the story of Noah who was the first of the Resolute Prophets and the chief of all prophets [after him]. The verses present a summary of what went on between him and his people: that most of them did not believe in him and thus God drowned them while He rescued Noah and the believers with him.

كَذَّبَتْ قَوْمُ نُوحٍ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿١٠٥﴾

(26:105) *The people* (qawm) *of Noah rejected* (kadhdhabat) *the messengers.*

Al-Mufradāt says:

> The original meaning of *qawm* is a group of men, not women. That is seen in the verse: *O you who believe! let not one* qawm *laugh at another* qawm… (49:11).[1] A poet said, "Is the clan of Ḥiṣn *qawm* or women?" However, the term in the Qur'an generally includes both men and women.

It has been said that *qawm* is masculine but has taken a feminine verb (*kadhdhabat*) because *qawm* means *jamāʿah* [which is synonymous with *qawm* but is grammatically feminine]. Others have said that *qawm* is feminine. *Al-Miṣbāḥ* says that it is used as both masculine and feminine [that is, it can take both pronouns].

They rejected only one messenger—Noah—but the verse says that they rejected "the messengers" [in plural]. This is because the message of all messengers is one; they are all united on monotheism. Hence, a person who rejects one of them has rejected all of them. It is for the same reason that God has described belief (*īmān*) in only some of the messengers as unbelief (*kufr*) [that is, total rejection of all messengers]: *Surely those who disbelieve in Allah and His messengers and (those who) desire to make a*

1 The verse subsequently says: *Nor let women (laugh) at other women* (49:11). It shows that *qawm* does not include women since they are mentioned separately. (Trans.)

distinction between Allah and His messengers and say: We believe in some and disbelieve in others, and desire to take a course between (this and) that. These it is that are truly unbelievers (4:150-151).

Some exegetes have said: The expression here is like when one says, "so-and-so rides horses" or "he wears silk clothes," even though the person may ride only one horse or have only one silk shirt. The plural in this case represents a genus. However, the first explanation is more plausible. Both explanations also apply to other similar verses such as "*ʿĀd rejected the messengers*" (26:123) and "*Thamūd rejected the messengers*" (26:141).

إِذْ قالَ لَهُمْ أَخُوهُمْ نُوحٌ أَ لا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٠٦﴾

(26:106) ***When their brother Noah said to them: Will you not guard (against evil)?***

"Brother" here means "relative." It is like saying "the brother of Tamīm" and "the brother of Kulayb."[1] The question form here implies admonition.

إِنِّي لَكُمْ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٌ ﴿١٠٧﴾

(26:107) ***Surely I am a trustworthy messenger to you;***

That is: "I am a messenger sent from God and I can be trusted regarding the message that I have been given to bring. I do not convey anything other than what my Lord has instructed me to." Based on these points he made the following conclusion:

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَ أَطِيعُونِ ﴿١٠٨﴾

(26:108) ***Therefore guard against (the punishment of) Allah and obey me.***

He ordered them to obey him because obeying him is obeying God.

وَ ما أَسْئَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلاَّ عَلى رَبِّ الْعالَمِينَ ﴿١٠٩﴾

(26:109) ***And I do not ask you any reward for it; my reward is only with the Lord of the worlds.***

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1 Tamīm and Kulayb refer to the two Arab tribes of Banū Tamīm and Banū Kulayb. The "brother" of a tribe designates one who has some kinship with them. (Trans.)

"Not asking any reward" means that "I have no worldly interest or objective in my call." This shows that that he sincerely wants what is good for them, and he is not betraying or deceiving them in his call. Given this trait of his, they must obey him in what he orders them. That is why he said once again: *So guard against (the punishment of) Allah and obey me* (26:110).

Here he refers to God as "Lord of the worlds" instead of God. This is an explicit expression of monotheism, because they believed that He was the God of the realm of gods, but the other realms each had its separate god besides Him, and they used to worship those gods. Hence, stating that He is the Lord of all worlds is an explicit expression of His unity in worship and a negation of all gods besides Him in all realms.

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَ أَطِيعُونِ ﴿١١٠﴾

(26:110) ***So guard against (the punishment of) Allah and obey me.***

We already mentioned the reason for this repetition: it shows that each of the two qualities mentioned above—that is, trustworthiness and not asking any reward—suffices as a reason for why they must obey him.

قالُوا أَ نُؤْمِنُ لَكَ وَ اتَّبَعَكَ الْأَرْذَلُونَ ﴿١١١﴾

(26:111) ***They said: Shall we believe in you while the lowest (of the people)*** **(al-ardhalūn)** ***follow you?***

Ardhalūn is the plural of *ardhal*, which is a comparative noun derived from *radhālah*, meaning "abasement and lowliness." What they meant by his followers being "the lowest of people" was that they had base jobs and abject occupations. That is why he replied to this objection by saying: *And what knowledge have I of what they used to do?* (26:112).

This shows that they considered honor and nobility to be a matter of having abundant wealth and copious children and servants. This is inferred from Noah's supplication: *My Lord! surely they have disobeyed me and followed him whose wealth and children have added to him nothing but loss* (71:21). Hence, what they meant by "the lowest of the people" are those whom the rich and the elite saw as inferior and avoided associating with them. These would include the slaves, the poor, and those who held menial jobs.

قالَ وَ ما عِلْمِي بِما كانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١١٢﴾

(26:112) ***He said: And what* (mā) *knowledge have I of what they used to do?***

"He" refers to Noah. The particle *mā* is indicative of a [rhetorical] question (*istifhāmiyyah*). Some have said that it is a negative particle (*nāfiyah*; that is, it negates what follows it), in which case its predicate has been omitted because it can be inferred from the context. Either way, it means that he does not know about their deeds *before they believed*, which is inferred from "used to do" (*kānū yaʿmalūna*).

إِنْ حِسابُهُمْ إِلاَّ عَلى رَبِّي لَوْ تَشْعُرُونَ ﴿١١٣﴾

(26:113) ***Their account is only with my Lord, if only you could perceive.***

By saying "my Lord" he means "the Lord of the worlds," for He was the One Who appointed Noah among all of his people as a messenger. "*If only you could perceive*" is an independent clause. It means: "If you had perception."[1] Some exegetes have interpreted it as: "If you could perceive anything then you would have known that." However, this is not a plausible interpretation.

Based on the exclusive structure of the first part of the verse, the implied meaning is: I have no knowledge about their past actions, and it is not my place to investigate and inquire about their actions. Rather, their account is only with my Lord, and if only you could perceive, you would have seen that He will reward them based on their actions.

وَ ما أَنَا بِطارِدِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١١٤﴾ إِنْ أَنَا إِلاَّ نَذِيرٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿١١٥﴾

(26:114-115) ***And I am not going to drive away the believers; I am naught but a plain warner.***

The second verse explains the first, and the two verses together complement what was said before. The implied meaning is: My role is only to

1 That is, "if only" (the Arabic particle *law*) does not introduce a condition for some consequence, but it stands alone as an independent clause, and implies a sense of yearning or regret. (Trans.)

call and warn. That is why I am not going to drive away those who turn to me and believe in me. Nor will I investigate their previous acts in order to take account of them, because their reckoning is not up to me but it is only up to my Lord, Who is the Lord of the worlds.

قالُوا لَئِنْ لَمْ تَنْتَهِ يا نُوحُ لَتَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمَرْجُومِينَ ﴿١١٦﴾

(26:116) *They said: If you desist not* (lam yantahi, from intihāʾ), *O Noah, you shall most certainly be of those stoned to death* (al-marjūmīn, from rajm).

Here *intihāʾ* means "stopping his call" (*daʿwah*). *Rajm* is "to stone someone." Some have said that it means "swearing at someone," but that is an unlikely meaning here because they said this later on in his messengership, when they severely threatened him, which is inferred from the use of emphasis in the verse.

قالَ رَبِّ إِنَّ قَوْمِي كَذَّبُونِ ﴿١١٧﴾

(26:117) *He said: My Lord! Surely my people deny me!*

Here he asks God for resolution. He first sets the grounds by saying: *My Lord! Surely my people deny me!* That is: They have settled on denying me absolutely, which leaves no more hope that they will accept me. This is also inferred from his supplication against them where he says: *My Lord! Leave not upon the land any dweller from among the unbelievers, for surely if Thou leave them, they will lead Thy servants astray, and will not beget any but immoral, ungrateful (children)* (71:26-27).

فَافْتَحْ بَيْنِي وَ بَيْنَهُمْ فَتْحاً وَ نَجِّنِي وَ مَنْ مَعِيَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١١٨﴾

(26:118) *Therefore judge* (fa-iftaḥ) *Thou between me and them with a (just) judgment* (fatḥan) *and deliver me and those who are with me of the believers.*

The verse literally says, "Make an opening between me and them," where "opening" figuratively implies "judgment" between the two sides. This idea is seen in the verse: *And every nation had a messenger; so when their messenger came, the matter was decided between them with justice, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly* (10:47).

This expression is originally based on an indirect metaphor. It is as

if he, his followers, and the unbelievers among his people were all mixed together without any distinction between them. So he asks his Lord to "open up a gap" between them such that the two groups would be separated from one another. This is a way of asking for a punishment that would befall them—which would only exterminate the evil-doers—because he says next: *And deliver me and those who are with me of the believers.*

Some have said that *fatḥ* means "to judge and decree," derived from *fatāḥah* meaning "judgment."[1]

فَأَنْجَيْناهُ وَ مَنْ مَعَهُ فِي الْفُلْكِ الْمَشْحُونِ ﴿١١٩﴾

(26:119) ***So We delivered him and those with him in the laden* (al-mashḥūn)** ***ark.***

"Laden ark" refers to an ark that was filled by them and by two—that is, a pair—of every species, as mentioned in Sūrah Hūd.[2]

ثُمَّ أَغْرَقْنا بَعْدُ الْباقِينَ ﴿١٢٠﴾

(26:120) ***Then We drowned the rest afterwards.***

That is: We drowned those of his people who remained after saving them [Noah and his followers].

إِنَّ فِي ذلِكَ لَآيَةً وَ ما كانَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٢١﴾ وَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٢٢﴾

(26:121) ***Most surely there is a sign in this, but most of them were not believers. And most surely your Lord is the Mighty, the Merciful.***

We discussed these verses above.

Examining Narrations

(1) Imam al-Bāqir said: Noah remained amongst his people for 950 years. He was the only prophet sent to them at his time, but his

1 The meaning would be the same, except that here "judgment" would be the lexical—not the metaphorical—meaning of *fatḥ*. (Trans.)

2 See verses 11:40 and 23:27. (Trans.)

people had rejected the prophets who were before him and after Adam. That is why He says: *the people of Noah rejected the messengers …And most surely your Lord is the Mighty, the Merciful* (26:105, 122)—where "the messengers" are the ones who were between Adam and him.

The Imam also said in the same hadith: There were ten fathers linking him [Noah] to Adam, all of whom were prophets.[1]

(2) Concerning "*the meanest follow you*" (26:111) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It means the poor.

(3) Concerning "*the laden ark*" (26:119) Imam al-Bāqir said: That was a fully equipped ark that he had finished building and only had to be released on water.[2]

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1 *Kamāl al-dīn* and *Rawḍat al-kāfī*, with its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Ḥamzah.

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

Verses 123-140

These verses refer to the story of Hūd and his people known as ʿĀd.

كَذَّبَتْ عادٌ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿١٢٣﴾

(26:123) ***ʿĀd rejected the messengers.***

ʿĀd was an ancient Arab tribe living in the Aḥqāf (lit. "sand-dunes") in the Arabian Peninsula. They had an advanced civilization, fertile lands and pleasant homes. However, they rebelled, denied God's messengers, and were ungrateful for His blessings. Thus God destroyed them with a destructive wind, obliterated their buildings, and effaced their works.

It has been said that ʿĀd was the name of their forefather. Hence, their tribe was named after their forefather, just like when one says Tamīm, Bakr or Taghlib, meaning respectively Banū Tamīm, Banū Bakr and Banū Taghlib [where Banū means "the children of…"].

In the story of Noah above, we explained why it is said that his people denied the messengers [in plural] even though they apparently rejected only one of them.

إِذْ قالَ لَهُمْ أَخُوهُمْ هُودٌ أَ لا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٢٤﴾ إِنِّي لَكُمْ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٌ ﴿١٢٥﴾ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَ أَطِيعُونِ ﴿١٢٦﴾ وَ ما أَسْئَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلاَّ عَلى رَبِّ الْعالَمِينَ ﴿١٢٧﴾

(26:124-127) ***When their brother Hūd said to them: Will you not guard (against evil)? Surely I am a trustworthy messenger to you; Therefore guard against (the punishment of) Allah and obey me. And I do not ask you any reward for it; surely my reward is only with the Lord of the worlds.***

The exposition of these verses was discussed under similar verses above in the story of Noah. One exegete has said:

> The five stories in this chapter start by stating that the prophet was trustworthy and faithful, he did not ask any reward for his

message, and he ordered the people to have *taqwā* (self-restraint, Godwariness) and to obey him. This common thread indicates that the foundation of messengership is to call the people to know God and abide by instructions that would take them closer to reward and would distance them from punishment. The prophets were unanimous on that despite their differences in some branches of religious law that varied with time and age. It also shows that all prophets were completely free from worldly greed and material incentives.

A similar point can be made about the ending of all of the seven stories[1] in this chapter with "*Most surely there is a sign in this, but most of them were not believers. And most surely your Lord is the Mighty, the Merciful*" (26:67-68, 26:103-104, 26:121-122, 26:139-140, 26:158-159, 26:174-175, 190-191). This thread shows that most nations and people are averse to God's signs and communications, that God is Mighty in punishing them for their denial, and that He is Merciful in rescuing the believers by His mercy. We discussed this thread where we talked about the purpose of the chapter at the beginning.

أَ تَبْنُونَ بِكُلِّ رِيعٍ آيَةً تَعْبَثُونَ ﴿١٢٨﴾

(26:128) *Do you build on every height* (rīʿin) *a monument* (āyatan)*? Vain is what you do* (taʿbathūna, from ʿabath).

Rīʿ means "a land that has elevation." *Āyah* means "sign." *ʿAbath* is "a futile action." Apparently they used to build buildings like monuments and towers on the heights and peaks of mountains in order to show off and take pride in them—not because of any need for doing so, but only in vain and out of their desires. Thus he [Prophet Hūd] blamed them for it.

The exegetes have suggested other meanings for the verse that are unwarranted by the text and inconsistent with the context, so we shall skip them.

وَ تَتَّخِذُونَ مَصانِعَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَخْلُدُونَ ﴿١٢٩﴾

1 The shared beginning is not mentioned in the stories of Moses and Abraham but the shared ending is. That is why the shared beginning has appeared five times, as opposed to seven shared endings. (Trans.)

(26:129) ***And you make strong fortresses*** **(maṣāniʿa)** ***that perhaps you may last forever?***

Maṣāniʿ has been defined as "strong castles, solid fortresses, tall buildings." It is the plural of *maṣnaʿ*.

…that perhaps you may last forever? This is an explanation for what was said before. That is: "You make these strong fortresses *because* you expect to live forever. Otherwise, if you did not hope for immortality, you would not have erected these buildings that would naturally outlive human beings." Exegetes have suggested some other interpretations for this verse and its words which we shall disregard.

وَ إِذا بَطَشْتُمْ بَطَشْتُمْ جَبَّارِينَ ﴿١٣٠﴾

(26:130) ***And when you lay hands (on men) you lay hands*** **(baṭashtum, from baṭsh)** ***(like) tyrants*** **(jabbārīn);**

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> *Baṭsh* is to "kill someone by the sword or hit someone with a whip." *Jabbār* is "one who rises over others and is exalted in power." It is a commendable attribute for God but a condemnable attribute for other than Him because it means that a servant has assumed himself to be elevated and supreme.

The implied meaning is: When you want to show intensity in action and fights you exceed in doing so, just as tyrants exceed in their cruelty.

The essence of the last three verses is: You are transgressors in terms of both appetite (*shahwah*) and anger (*ghaḍab*). You are not following a balanced path and have gone beyond the limits of servitude.

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَ أَطِيعُونِ ﴿١٣١﴾

(26:131) ***So guard against (the punishment of) Allah and obey me.***

This is his conclusion based on their transgression beyond the boundaries of servitude and their excess lust and anger. They should be wary and fearful of God; they should obey him [Hūd a.s.] when he commands them to let go of extravagance and arrogance.

وَ اتَّقُوا الَّذِی أَمَدَّكُمْ بِما تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٣٢﴾ أَمَدَّكُمْ بِأَنْعامٍ وَ بَنِينَ ﴿١٣٣﴾ وَ جَنَّاتٍ وَ عُيُونٍ ﴿١٣٤﴾

(26:132-134) ***And be careful of (your duty to) Him Who has given you an abundance*** **(amaddakum, from madd)** ***of what you know. He has given you an abundance of cattle and children. And gardens and fountains;***

Al-Rāghib says (summarized):

> The root meaning of *madd* is to "drag, extend, stretch." It is used when one helps an army by providing support, or helps a person by giving him food. Usually it is used in the form *imdād* for desirable things, and in the form *madd* for undesirable things [that is, adding to one's pleasure or displeasure]. He says: *And We will aid them* (amdadnāhum) *with fruit and meats such as they desire* (52:22); *And We will lengthen to him* (namuddu lahu) *the length* (maddan) *of the chastisement* (19:79).

And be careful of (your duty to) Him Who has given you an abundance: When a description is stated instead of a noun [in this case for God, swt] it hints that the stated description is an explanation and justification for what is being said.[1] Here the meaning is: "Be careful of your duty to Him Who has given you abundant bounties *because* He has given you abundant bounties. Thus it is incumbent on you to thank Him by using His bounties properly without extravagance or arrogance. Otherwise, ungratefulness for His bounties will bring about His wrath and punishment." He says: *If you are grateful, I would certainly give you more, and if you are ungrateful, My chastisement is truly severe* (14:7).

He first mentioned bounties concisely as "*an abundance of what you know*" (26:132) and then elaborated on that by saying: *He has given you an abundance of cattle and children. And gardens and fountains* (26:133-134).

…Who has given you an abundance of what you know. Here he adds another point. He is saying: "You know that these bounties are His aid and blessings, without any other partners in creating or bestowing them. Thus, *He* is the One—and not the idols—Whom you must fear and guard against through worship and gratitude." Therefore, this expression involves an argument.

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1 This is a very useful principle in studying the Qur'an. For example, when the Qur'an says, "*God does not guide the wrongdoers*" (in numerous verses), it means that He does not guide them *because* of their wrongdoing. (Trans.)

إِنِّي أَخافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿١٣٥﴾

(26:135) ***Surely I fear for you the chastisement of a grievous day.***

This is an explanation for his order to have *taqwā*. That is: "I command you to be wary and fear God out of gratitude because I fear for you the chastisement of a grievous day in case you are ungrateful and fail to give thanks." Apparently the "grievous day" is the Day of Resurrection. Some exegetes have accepted the possibility that it may refer to the day when they were exterminated by divine punishment [in this world].

قالُوا سَواءٌ عَلَيْنا أَ وَعَظْتَ أَمْ لَمْ تَكُنْ مِنَ الْواعِظِينَ ﴿١٣٦﴾

(26:136) ***They said: It is the same to us whether you admonish or are not one of the admonishers.***

Here they deny the effectiveness of his speech, and thus make him completely lose hope in them ever believing.

One exegete has noted that instead of saying, "or you do not admonish" they said, "or you are not one of the admonishers," which means "not being an admonisher altogether to begin with." This expression conveys emphasis and exaggeration [in their denial].

إِنْ هذا إِلاَّ خُلُقُ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٣٧﴾

(26:137) ***This is naught but a custom*** **(khuluq)** ***of the ancients;***

The word here is *khuluq* or *khulq*. Al-Rāghib says:

> *Khalq* and *khulq* have the same root—like *shirb* and *shurb*, or *ṣarm* and *ṣirm*—but *khalq* is specifically for shapes and forms that can be observed by sight, while *khulq* is specifically for faculties and traits that are observable by insight. He says: *And most surely you conform (yourself) to sublime morality* (khuluqin ʿaẓīm) (68:4), and it has been recited: *This is naught but a custom* (khuluq) *of the ancients* (26:137).

"This" (*hādhā*) refers to the message that Hūd had brought, which they called admonishment (*waʿẓ*) [in the last verse]. The implied meaning is: "This call to monotheism and admonishment that you have assumed is nothing but the custom of ancient people who followed myths and legends." Hence, this is similar to their [the disbelievers'] claim: *This is naught*

but the stories of the ancients (6:25, 8:31, 23:83, 27:68).

Another possibility is that "this" refers to their polytheism and worship of idols besides God, following the footsteps their ancient fathers. That would be like their statement: *We found our fathers doing so* (26:74).

Some exegetes have suggested the following interpretation as a possibility: "This creation (*khalq*) of ours is just like the creation of the ancients; we live and die just as they died, and there will be no resurrection, reckoning or punishment." However, this interpretation is improbable given the context.

وَ ما نَحْنُ بِمُعَذَّبِينَ ﴿١٣٨﴾ فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَأَهْلَكْناهُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذلِكَ لَآيَةً وَ ما كانَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٣٩﴾ وَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٤٠﴾

(26:138) ***And we are not going to be punished.***

This is their denial of the hereafter, assuming that the "*grievous day*" (26:135) in Hūd's speech was a reference to the Day of Resurrection.

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَأَهْلَكْناهُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذلِكَ لَآيَةً وَ ما كانَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٣٩﴾ وَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٤٠﴾

(26:139-140) ***So they rejected him; then We destroyed them. Most surely there is a sign in this, but most of them were not believers. And most surely your Lord is the Mighty, the Merciful.***

The meaning is clear based on our previous exposition.

Examining Narrations

(1) Imam al-Bāqir said: Noah told his people, Indeed God will appoint a prophet named Hūd. He will call his people to God but they will reject him, so God will destroy them with the wind. Whoever amongst you sees him should believe in him and follow him, for indeed God will rescue him from the punishment of the wind.

Noah ordered his son Shem (Sām) to renew their allegiance to this will every year and make that day a feast when they would renew their allegiance to Hūd's messengership and await the time when he would rise. When God appointed Hūd, they looked at what

they had in terms of knowledge, faith, inherited teachings, God's Greatest Name and what remained of prophetic knowledge. They found that Hūd was indeed a prophet and that their father Noah had given the good news of his coming. Therefore they believed in him, attested to his messengership, and followed him. As a result God saved them from the punishment of the wind. This is what God says: *And to ʿĀd (We sent) their brother Hūd* (7:65), and: *ʿĀd rejected the messengers when their brother Hūd said to them: Will you not guard (against evil)?* (26:123-124).[1]

(2) *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: "A monument in vain" (*āyatan taʿbathūna*; 26:128) refers to what you do not need for your residence, but you build only in vain, sport and as a distraction. Therefore, it is as if he is saying that building what you do not need is equivalent to acting in vain. This is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās on the authority of ʿAṭāʾ.

This is confirmed by a narration on the authority of Anas b. Mālik: Once the Messenger of God went out [in the city, or out of the city] and saw a dome. "What is this?" he asked. His Companions replied, "This belongs to one of the Anṣār." The Prophet remained there until the owner came and said salaam, but the Prophet turned his face away from him. This was repeated until the man realized that the Prophet had done so intentionally because he was displeased with him.

He complained to his friends about it and said, "By God I do not like the Messenger of God's treatment [of me], yet I do not know if some news has come about me or if I have done something wrong." They told him, "God's Messenger came out, saw your dome and asked, 'Whose is this?' and we told him about it." So the man went to his dome and leveled it to the ground.

Then the Messenger of God came out another day and did not see the dome. He said, "What happened to the dome that was here?" They said, "Its owner complained to us about your aversion to him. We told him about it, so he tore it down."

Then the Prophet said, "Everything that is built will be a burden

1 *Kamāl al-dīn* and *Rawḍat al-kāfī*, with its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Ḥamzah.

on its owner on the Day of Resurrection—except for that which is absolutely necessary."

(3) Concerning verse 26:130 (*And when you lay hands (on men) you lay hands (like) tyrants*) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It means: you wrongfully kill people out of anger.

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Verses 141-159

These verses summarize the story of Ṣāliḥ and his people. He was one of the Arab prophets who is mentioned in the Qur'an after Hūd.

كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿١٤١﴾ إِذْ قالَ لَهُمْ أَخُوهُمْ صالِحٌ أَ لا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٤٢﴾ إِنِّي لَكُمْ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٌ ﴿١٤٣﴾ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَ أَطِيعُونِ ﴿١٤٤﴾ وَ ما أَسْئَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلاَّ عَلى رَبِّ الْعالَمِينَ ﴿١٤٥﴾

(26:141-145) ***Thamūd rejected the messengers. When their brother Ṣāliḥ said to them: Will you not guard (against evil)? Surely I am a trustworthy messenger to you. Therefore guard against (the punishment of) Allah and obey me. And I do not ask you any reward for it; my reward is only with the Lord of the worlds.***

The meaning of these verses should be clear based on our previous discussions.

أَ تُتْرَكُونَ فِي ما هاهُنا آمِنِينَ ﴿١٤٦﴾

(26:146) ***Will you be left secure in what*** **(mā)** ***is here*** **(hāhunā)*;***

Apparently this is a rhetorical question which implies a negation. The particle *mā* is called *mawṣūlah* (meaning "what"), and it refers to the bounties that are elaborated later: *In gardens and fountains…* (26:147). *Hāhunā* (meaning "here") is used to refer to a place that is near and present, which in this case is the land of Thamūd. "Secure" is the condition (*ḥāl*) of those who are "left."

The implied meaning is: You will not be left in these bounties that are surrounding you in this land of yours completely on your own, without being questioned about what you do, and secure from all accountability to God.

فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَ عُيُونٍ ﴿١٤٧﴾ وَ زُرُوعٍ وَ نَخْلٍ طَلْعُها هَضِيمٌ ﴿١٤٨﴾

(26:147-148) ***In gardens and fountains, And tilled fields and laden***

palm-trees* (ṭalʿuhā haḍīm)*?

This is an elaboration of "*in what is here*" (26:146). Although gardens include palms, he mentioned palms separately because of their significance to them. *Ṭalʿ* in palms is equivalent to blossoms in other trees. *Haḍīm* has been defined as "overlapping and joined together."

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وَ تَنْحِتُونَ مِنَ الْجِبالِ بُيُوتاً فارِهِينَ ﴿١٤٩﴾

(26:149) *And you hew houses out of the mountains exultingly* (fārihīn)*;*

Al-Rāghib says (summarized):

> *Farih* is a *ṣifah mushbbahah* [a firm and stable attribute] that means *ashir* (exulting). In the verse, "*And you hew houses out of the mountains* fārihīn" (26:149), *fārihīn* means "skillfully." It has also been interpreted as "exultingly."

Based on his preference [that is, *fārihīn* meaning "skillfully"] the verse is describing God's bounties on them. Based on the other meaning [that is, *fārihīn* meaning "exultingly"] the verse is being critical of their exultation and extravagance. Either way, the verse continues the rhetorical question above.

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فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَ أَطِيعُونِ ﴿١٥٠﴾

(26:150) *Therefore guard against (the punishment of) Allah and obey me.*

This is a conclusion of the previous criticism which implied a negative answer to the rhetorical questions above.

وَ لا تُطِيعُوا أَمْرَ الْمُسْرِفِينَ ﴿١٥١﴾ الَّذِينَ يُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَ لا يُصْلِحُونَ﴿١٥٢﴾

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(26:151-152) *And do not obey the bidding* (amr) *of the extravagant, Who make mischief in the land and do not act aright.*

Apparently *amr* (command, order, bid) here is the opposite of *nahy* (prohibition), because he is commanding them against obeying their *amr*. Some exegetes have accepted the possibility that *amr* here means *shaʾn*

(affair, position, status, business). Based on this meaning, obeying their *amr* would mean being their followers and pursuing a course of action that they wanted the general population to take.

Either way, the extravagant are the chiefs and elite who lead the society. Here he is addressing the general public who followed the elite, because he had despaired of the chiefs and elites ever believing and following the truth.

It could also be this is a general address to everyone, where it would also include the elite, because they were following their forefathers and obeying their command [or affair], just as they told Ṣāliḥ: *Do you (now) forbid us from worshipping what our fathers worshipped?* (11:62). Thus, they were all obeying the extravagant people, and that is why he prohibited them from doing so.

He then defines and interprets "the extravagant" (*al-musrifin*)—that is, those who transgress the truth and exceed the balanced limits—by saying: *Who make mischief in the land and do not act aright* (26:152). This indicates the real reason for his prohibition. The implied meaning is: Be wary of God and do not obey the bidding of the extravagant because they make mischief in the land and do not act properly; those who make mischief are not secure from God's punishment, for He is Mighty and Vengeful.

Even though the universe is composed of parts that exhibit conflict and interference between them, there is a special congruence between its parts that brings about a desired result and effect. They are like the two pans of a scale that oppose one another when going up or down, yet they complement each other in determining the weight of what is being weighed, and that is the desired objective. The human world—which is a part of the universe—is also like that. This similarly applies to each individual: even though one has different organs and opposing faculties, they are created with a balance in their functions and activities, such that each faculty achieves its appointed share. One is also equipped with an intellect which distinguishes good and evil, and which gives every faculty its proper due.

The universe moves toward the objective that is desired from it under the system that governs it. The complete connection that is between the different parts of the universe outlines a specific path for every part of the universe so that it may pursue it without inclining right or left from its middle course, and without deviating from it due to lack or excess.

Otherwise, an inclination or deviation would ruin the entire system. That would in turn prevent the achievement of the general objective of the universe, which would mean the failure of all parts. It thus follows that should any part contravene the path that has been drawn for it, the other parts will oppose it, for that deviation would ruin the entire system. If the other parts can mend it and bring it back to the balanced middle course, they will do so; otherwise they will destroy and efface it in order to maintain the well-being of the universe as a whole, so that it may continue properly.

The human being is part of this universe, and thus is no exception to this universal system. If people follow the guidance of their innate nature (*fiṭrah*), they will achieve their appointed felicity, but if they transgress the limits of their *fiṭrah* and make mischief in the land, then God will inflict famine, natural disasters and various forms of punishment upon them so that they may return to the right and constructive path. He says: *Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea on account of what the hands of people have wrought, that He may make them taste a part of what they have done, so that they may return* (30:41).

If they still continue their mischief because it is rooted in their hearts, then God will destroy them with an exterminating punishment, and will clear the earth from the defilement of their mischief. He says: *And if the people of the towns had believed and guarded (against evil), We would certainly have opened up for them blessings from the heaven and the earth, but they rejected it, so We overtook them for what they had earned* (7:96), *And it would not have been beseeming to your Lord to have destroyed the towns tyrannously, while their people acted well* (11:117), and: *That (as for) the earth, My righteous servants shall inherit it* (21:105). The reason for their inheritance of the earth is that if they are righteous, their actions will be appropriate; and appropriate actions will be in harmony with the general system of the universe. As a result, the earth will improve and become more appropriate for their life in it.

The above discussion shows two points: (1) The reality of the prophetic call is to improve human life on earth. He has narrated from Shuʿayb (Jethro): *I desire nothing but reform so far as I am able* (11:88). (2) Ṣāliḥ's apparently simple statement—*And do not obey the bidding* (amr) *of the extravagant, who make mischief* (26:151-152)—is in fact based on a rational argument.

He specifically added "*and do not act aright*" after saying "*Who make*

mischief in the land" (26:152). Perhaps he did so to suggest that they are human beings with the same human nature (*fiṭrah*), and thus they are expected to act aright on the earth, but they have deviated from their nature and have substituted mischief for right action.

قالُوا إِنَّما أَنْتَ مِنَ الْمُسَحَّرِينَ ﴿١٥٣﴾

(26:153) ***They said: You are only of the bewitched*** **(al-musaḥḥarīn).**

A *musaḥḥar* is one who has been bewitched so many times that his intellect has been overcome. Some exegetes have said that *saḥr* means the part that is above the stomach, and *musaḥḥar* means one who has a belly. Therefore this expression is a metaphorical way of saying that you are a human being like us who eats and drinks, which is then emphasized by their following statement: *You are naught but a mortal like ourselves* (26:154). Others have said that *musaḥḥar* is one who has a *saḥr* which means "lung." Therefore what they meant was that you are a breathing mortal like ourselves.

ما أَنْتَ إِلاَّ بَشَرٌ مِثْلُنا فَأْتِ بِآيَةٍ إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿١٥٤﴾ قالَ هذِهِ ناقَةٌ لَها شِرْبٌ وَ لَكُمْ شِرْبُ يَوْمٍ مَعْلُومٍ ﴿١٥٥﴾ وَ لا تَمَسُّوها بِسُوءٍ فَيَأْخُذَكُمْ عَذابُ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿١٥٦﴾

(26:154-156) ***You are naught but a mortal like ourselves; so bring a sign if you are one of the truthful. He said: This is a she-camel; she shall have her portion of water*** **(shirb),** ***and you have your portion of water at an appointed time; And do not touch her with evil, lest the punishment of a grievous day overtake you.***

Shirb means "a share of water." The rest is clear and the story was discussed in detail in Chapter 11 (Hūd).[1]

فَعَقَرُوها فَأَصْبَحُوا نادِمِينَ ﴿١٥٧﴾

(26:157) ***But they hamstrung her, then regretted.***

The act of hamstringing has been ascribed to all of them even

1 See verses 11:61-68. (Trans.)

though it was carried out by only one of them. This is because they were satisfied with his act. We read in *Nahj al-balāghah* [by Imam ʿAlī, a.s.]:

> O people! Certainly what gathers people together is [their] satisfaction and dissatisfaction. One individual killed the camel of Thamūd, but God punished them all because they all joined him through their acquiescence. Thus God says: *But they hamstrung her, then regretted* (26:157).

…then regretted: Perhaps their regret was only when they saw the signs of punishment. Otherwise, when they hamstrung the camel, they told him [Ṣāliḥ] in defiance and derision: *O Ṣāliḥ! bring us what you threatened us with, if you are one of the messengers* (7:77).

فَأَخَذَهُمُ الْعَذابُ إِنَّ فِي ذلِكَ لَآيَةً وَ ما كانَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٥٨﴾ وَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٥٩﴾

(26:158-159) ***So the punishment*** **(al-ʿadhāb)** ***overtook them. Most surely there is a sign in this, but most of them were not believers. And most surely your Lord is the Mighty, the Merciful.***

The article *al-* (lit. "the") in *al-ʿadhāb* is definite. It means the promised punishment [which was mentioned and known from before]. That is what Ṣāliḥ had promised would befall them after three days, as mentioned in Chapter 11 (Hūd). The rest is clear.

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Verses 160-175

These verses pertain to the story of Prophet Lot who came after Ṣāliḥ.

كَذَّبَتْ قَوْمُ لُوطٍ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿١٦٠﴾ إِذْ قالَ لَهُمْ أَخُوهُمْ لُوطٌ أَ لا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٦١﴾
إِنِّي لَكُمْ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٌ ﴿١٦٢﴾ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَ أَطِيعُونِ ﴿١٦٣﴾

(26:160-164) ***The people of Lot rejected the messengers. When their brother Lot said to them: Will you not guard (against evil)? Surely I am a trustworthy messenger to you; Therefore guard against (the punishment of) Allah and obey me. And I do not ask you any reward for it; my reward is only with the Lord of the worlds;***

The exposition of these verses was discussed above.

أَ تَأْتُونَ الذُّكْرانَ مِنَ الْعالَمِينَ ﴿١٦٥﴾

(26:165) ***What! Do you come to the males*** **(al-dhukrān)** ***from among all people*** **(al-ʿālamīn).**

This is a censuring and disapproving rhetorical question. *Dhukrān* is the plural of *dhakar* (male) which is the opposite of *unthā* (female). "Coming to them" metaphorically means "sodomy" (*lawāṭ*) which was prevalent among them. *ʿĀlamīn* is the plural of *ʿālam*, meaning "a group of people."

…from among all people **(al-ʿālamīn)*:*** This part of the verse could be connected to the subject that is implied by the conjugate form of *taʾtūna* (that is, "you" in "*do you come*"). The meaning would be: "What! Do you, among all people, do such an abhorrent act?" This would make the verse similar to what he has said elsewhere: *Which no one in the world has ever done before you?* (7:80, 29:28).

It could also be connected to "the males" (*al-dhukrān*). The meaning would then be: Among all of the people—despite their large number and inclusion of women—do you come to the males alone?

وَ تَذَرُونَ ما خَلَقَ لَكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ مِنْ أَزْواجِكُمْ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ عادُونَ ﴿١٦٦﴾

(26:166) ***And leave*** **(tadharūna)** ***what*** **(mā)** ***your Lord has created for you*** **(lakum)** ***of your wives*** **(min azwājikum)*****? Nay, you are a people exceeding limits.***

Tadharūna means "to leave, to abandon." There is no past tense for its root.

One only needs to reflect on the creation of humankind, the classification of its individuals into male and female, and the specific organs and faculties that each class has been equipped with. Then one will not doubt that the purpose of creation in setting this difference, placing sexual desire in both classes, and dividing the active and passive roles between them, has been to make them join together in sexual intercourse as a means of procreation, so that the human species may subsist until its appointed time.

A man (or a male human), inasmuch as he is a man, has been created for a woman (or a female human), not for a man like himself; and a woman (or a female human), inasmuch as she is a woman, has been created for a man (or a male human), not for a woman like herself. The exclusive part of man's creation is for the woman, and the exclusive part of woman's creation is for the man. This is the "natural wedlock" that creation has set between man and woman as they compose a pair.

Marriage is a social and conventional custom that is established by social and/or religious considerations in order to place exclusivity between the couples and define the boundaries of the natural wedlock mentioned above. Therefore, human nature and one's specific creation [as male or female] lead to the pairing of men with women, and women with men; not men with men or women with women. This is because the foundation of marriage is procreation and reproduction, not merely a mutual partnership in life.

Based on the above, it is most plausible to say that "*what your Lord has created for you*" (lakum) refers to the female organ that becomes lawful for men by marriage. The letter *lām* in *lakum* ("for" in "for you") indicates an ownership that is set in nature. The particle *min* in *min azwājikum* ("of" in "of your wives") is partitive (*tabʿīḍiyyah*).[1] This verse concerns "natural marriage" [that is, marriage as the natural coupling of males and females], although in a way it could also refer to marriage as a social convention.

1 *Min tabʿīḍiyyah* means "some of" or "part of." So the meaning is: You leave the part of your wives that your Lord has created for you and assigned to you. (Trans.)

Some exegetes have mentioned the possibility that particle *mā* ("what" in "what your Lord has created for you") refers to women. Then "of your wives" would be an explanation and clarification of that.[1] However, this is unlikely.

…Nay, you are a people exceeding limits* (ʿādūn):*** *ʿĀdūn* here means "you transgress and go beyond the limits that creation and your nature has drawn for you." This is equivalent to: *What! Do you come to males and accost wayfarers?* (29:29).

All of the points above show that what he said was based on a rational argument latent in his speech.

قالُوا لَئِنْ لَمْ تَنْتَهِ يا لُوطُ لَتَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمُخْرَجِينَ ﴿١٦٧﴾

(26:67) ***They said: If you desist not, O Lot! You shall surely be of those who are expelled* (al-mukhrajīn).**

Mukhrajīn means "those who have been expelled from their land." This is similar to what is narrated from them in another verse: *Turn out Lot's followers from your town* (27:56).

قالَ إِنِّي لِعَمَلِكُمْ مِنَ الْقالِينَ ﴿١٦٨﴾

(26:168) ***He said: Surely I am of those who utterly abhor your action* (al-qālīn).**

Given the context, "your action" means coming to the males and leaving the females. *Qālī* means one who dislikes and is averse to something. They threatened him with exile but he answered with these words instead of responding to their threat. Therefore what he means is: "I am not afraid of being expelled from your town and do not care about it. Instead, I abhor your actions and want to be saved from the grim consequences that shall certainly befall you." That is why he continued by saying: *My Lord! Deliver me and my family from what they do* (26:169).

رَبِّ نَجِّنِي وَ أَهْلِي مِمَّا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٦٩﴾

(26:169) ***My Lord! Deliver me and my family from what they do.***

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1 Thus particle *min* would be *bayāniyyah* (explanatory, interpretive). The meaning would be: You leave the women—meaning your wives—whom your Lord has created for you and assigned to you. (Trans.)

He is asking for deliverance from the very action that they used to commit, meaning that he did not want to be present there and hear about it. This shows how he detested it. It could also mean deliverance from the consequence of their action, meaning the punishment that would undoubtedly follow it.

He only mentioned himself and his family because no one else in his town had believed in him. This is seen in the verse: *But We did not find therein save a (single) house of those who submitted* (51:36).

فَنَجَّيْناهُ وَ أَهْلَهُ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿١٧٠﴾ إِلاَّ عَجُوزاً فِي الْغابِرِينَ ﴿١٧١﴾ ثُمَّ دَمَّرْنَا الْآخَرِينَ ﴿١٧٢﴾

(26:170-172) ***So We delivered him and his followers all, Except an old woman, among those who remained behind*** **(al-ghābirīn).** ***Then We utterly destroyed*** **(dammarnā, from tadmīr)** ***the others.***

It has been said that *ghābir* means "one who stays behind after the departure of those who were with him." *Tadmīr* means "to destroy and kill." The rest is clear.

وَ أَمْطَرْنا عَلَيْهِمْ مَطَراً فَساءَ مَطَرُ الْمُنْذَرِينَ ﴿١٧٣﴾

(26:173) ***And We rained down upon them a rain, and evil was the rain on those who were warned.***

This was a rain of *sijjīl* (heated clay), as He says: *And We rained down upon them stones of baked clay* (15:74).

إِنَّ فِي ذلِكَ لَآيَةً وَ ما كانَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٧٤﴾ وَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٧٥﴾

(26:174-175) ***Most surely there is a sign in this, but most of them were not believers. And most surely your Lord is the Mighty, the Merciful.***

The exposition of these verses was discussed above

Verses 176-191

These verses present a summary of the story of Shuʿayb (Jethro, Reuel), who was one of the prophets of the Arabs. This is the last of the seven stories mentioned in this chapter.

كَذَّبَ أَصْحابُ الْأَيْكَةِ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿١٧٦﴾ إِذْ قالَ لَهُمْ شُعَيْبٌ أَ لا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٧٧﴾ إِنِّي لَكُمْ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٌ ﴿١٧٨﴾ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَ أَطِيعُونِ ﴿١٧٩﴾ وَ ما أَسْئَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلاَّ عَلى رَبِّ الْعالَمِينَ ﴿١٨٠﴾

(26:176-180) ***The dwellers of the thicket*** **(al-aykah)** ***rejected the messengers. When Shuʿayb said to them: Will you not guard (against evil)? Surely I am a trustworthy messenger to you; Therefore guard against (the punishment of) Allah and obey me. And I do not ask you any reward for it; my reward is only with the Lord of the worlds;***

Aykah means "a grove with dense vegetation." It is said that this was a thicket near Midian where some people used to live. Shuʿayb was also sent to them [in addition to Midian], but since he was not one of them, the verse says, "*When Shuʿayb said to them*" (26:177) instead of referring to him as "their brother Shuʿayb." This is unlike the expression in the stories of Hūd and Ṣāliḥ, who were relatives of their people. Likewise, Lot was a relative of his people by marriage. That is why they are referred to as "*their brother Hūd*" (26:124), "*their brother Ṣāliḥ*" (26:142), and "*their brother Lot*" (26:161).

The rest of the verses were discussed above.

أَوْفُوا الْكَيْلَ وَ لا تَكُونُوا مِنَ الْمُخْسِرِينَ ﴿١٨١﴾

(26:181-182) ***Give a full measure*** **(al-kayl),** ***and be not of those who diminish*** **(al-mukhsirīn, from ikhsār),** ***And weigh (things) with a straight balance*** **(bil-qisṭās al-mustaqīm).**

Kayl is a measure of volume for commodities. "Giving it in full" means

not reducing the volume. *Qisṭās* is a scale for measuring weight. It is "straight" if it weighs things justly. The two verses together order them to be just whether they give or take, whether by measure or weight.

وَ لا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْياءَهُمْ وَ لا تَعْثَوْا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ ﴿١٨٣﴾

(26:183) ***And do not wrong*** **(tabkhasū, from bakhs)** ***people of their things, and do not act corruptly on the earth, making mischief.***

Bakhs means "deficiency in weight and measurement," just as *ikhsār* (in 26:181) means "deficiency in capital."

"Their things" means their goods and commodities. The context suggests that "*Give a full measure*" (26:181) is complemented by what follows it: *and be not of those who diminish* (26:181), *And weigh (things) with a straight balance* (26:182), *And do not wrong people of their things* (26:183). Then "*and do not act corruptly on the earth, making mischief*" (26:183) describes the evil and unfortunate consequence of stinting and fraud, and emphasizes both prohibitions: *Be not of those who diminish* (26:181), *And do not wrong…* (26:183).

…and do not act corruptly **(taʿthaw, from ʿathy and ʿayth)** ***on the earth, making mischief*** **(mufsidīn):** *ʿAthy and ʿayth* mean "to corrupt." Therefore "making mischief" (*mufsidīn*) is mentioned for further emphasis. We already explained how stinting and fraud corrupt human societies in Shuʿayb's story in Sūrah Hūd[1] and in under the verse: *And give full measure when you measure out, and weigh with a true balance; this is fair and better in the end* (17:35). You may refer to those discussions.

وَ اتَّقُوا الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَ الْجِبِلَّةَ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٨٤﴾

(26:184) ***And guard against (the punishment of) Him who created you and the former nations*** **(al-jibbilat al-awwalīn).**

Majmaʿ al-bayān says, "*Jibbilah* is the formation according to which one is created." Therefore, what is meant here is "possessors of *jibillah*." That is: Guard against God Who created you and your forefathers, Who planted aversion to corruption and confession to its evilness in your natures and creations.

Perhaps verse specifically mentions the word *jibillah* (formation,

1 See verses 11:84-95. (Trans.)

creation) exactly to convey this meaning [that your action is against your own human nature]. Overall, the verse is a call to worship God alone because they were not wary and fearful of their Creator Who is the Lord of all worlds.

قالُوا إِنَّما أَنْتَ مِنَ الْمُسَحَّرِينَ ﴿١٨٥﴾ وَ ما أَنْتَ إِلاَّ بَشَرٌ مِثْلُنا وَ إِنْ نَظُنُّكَ لَمِنَ الْكاذِبِينَ ﴿١٨٦﴾

(26:185-186) ***They said: You are only of the bewitched; And you are naught but a mortal like ourselves, and we surely deem you* (in naẓunnuka)** ***to be certainly of the liars.***

The first part of these verses was discussed above. In the second verse where it says, *in naẓunnuka*, particle *in* is in fact *inna* (truly, indeed, surely), but the stress has been dropped.

فَأَسْقِطْ عَلَيْنا كِسَفاً مِنَ السَّماءِ إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿١٨٧﴾

(26:187) ***Therefore cause a portion* (kisafan)** ***of the heaven to come down upon us, if you are one of the truthful.***

Kisaf has been defined as the plural of *kisfah* which means "piece, portion, part." Their request here is out of derision and defiance.

قالَ رَبِّي أَعْلَمُ بِما تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٨٨﴾

(26:188) ***He said: My Lord knows best what you do.***

This is Shuʿayb's response to their speech and their request for punishment from him. It implies that the matter is not up to him to decide, but it is only up to God, for He knows best about what they do, whether or not their action deserves punishment, and if so, what punishment it should be. This is similar to what Hūd told his people: *The knowledge is only with Allah, and I deliver to you the message which I am sent with* (46:23).

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَأَخَذَهُمْ عَذابُ يَوْمِ الظُّلَّةِ إِنَّهُ كانَ عَذابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿١٨٩﴾

(26:189) ***But they called him a liar, so the punishment of the day of covering overtook them; surely it was the punishment of a grievous day.***

"The day of covering" was the day when Shuʿayb's people were punished by a cloud that overshadowed them. Their story was discussed in detail in Chapter 11 (Hūd).[1]

إِنَّ فِي ذٰلِكَ لَآيَةً وَ ما كانَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٩٠﴾ وَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٩١﴾

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(26:190-191) ***Most surely there is a sign in this, but most of them were not believers. And most surely your Lord is Mighty, the Merciful.***

The exposition of these verses was discussed above.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning verse 26:177 (*When Shuʿayb said to them*) *Jawāmiʿ al-jāmiʿ* says: According to hadith, Shuʿayb was from Midian, but he was sent to them and to the dwellers of the thicket (*aṣḥāb al-aykah*).

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(2) Concerning *al-jibillat al-awwalīn* in verse 26:184 (*And guard against (the punishment of) Him who created you and* al-jibillat al-awwalīn) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: "It means the former people." Concerning "they" in verse 26:189 (*But they called him a liar*) he said: "It refers to Shuʿayb's people." Concerning *yawm al-ẓullah* in verse 26:189 (*so the punishment of* yawm al-ẓullah *overtook them*), he said: "It means a day of heat and fatal winds."

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1 See verses 11:84-95. (Trans.)

Verses 192-227

These verses discuss what can be deduced as a conclusion from the seven stories mentioned above. They involve rebuke and threat against the unbelievers in this nation [of Prophet Muḥammad s.a.w.]. The verses defend the prophethood of the Prophet by arguing that it is found in the scriptures of the ancients and the knowledge of the Israelite learned men. They also defend his Book by arguing that it is not an inspiration from devils nor the words of poets.

وَ إِنَّهُ لَتَنْزِيلُ رَبِّ الْعالَمِينَ ﴿١٩٢﴾

(26:192) ***And most surely this is a revelation*** **(tanzīlu)** ***from the Lord of the worlds.***

The pronoun "this" refers to the Qur'an. The verse refers back to the beginning of the chapter where it said: "*These are the verses of the clear Book*" (26:2), and follow up their account of unbelief in the Book that was mentioned afterwards: *And there does not come to them a new reminder from the Beneficent God but they turn aside from it. So they have indeed rejected (the truth)…* (26:5-6).

Tanzīl and *inzāl* are synonymous, except that usually the verbal form *ifʿāl* [as in *inzāl*] is used for sudden acts, while the verbal form *tafʿīl* [as in *tanzīl*] is used for gradual acts. When the root *nuzūl* is used for physical objects, it means their movement from a high position to a lower position. In non-physical objects, their *nuzūl* (lit. descent) would be according to the object.

God's act of *tanzīl* (descent, sending down) means diffusing something from Him to the plane of creation and measurement. He has described Himself as the High, the Magnificent (*al-ʿAlī al-ʿAẓīm*), the Great the Exalted (*al-Kabīr al-Mutaʿāl*), the Exalter of ranks (*Rafiʿ al-darajāt*), and the All-Dominant over His servants (*al-Qāhir fawqa ʿibādih*). Thus, the diffusion of things from Him would be His creation of them in the realm of creation and measure. You can also say that His *tanzīl* means His act of bringing something out from the realm of the invisible to the realm of the visible.

This sense of *inzāl* and *tanzīl* has been used in His Book about several things. Some examples are: *O children of Adam! We have indeed sent down* (anzalnā) *to you clothing to cover your shame* (7:26); *And He has sent down* (anzala) *for you eight of the cattle in pairs* (39:6); *And We have sent down* (anzalnā) *iron, wherein is great violence* (57:25); and *Those who disbelieve from among the followers of the Book do not like, nor do the polytheists, that good should be sent down* (yunazzala) *to you from your Lord* (2:105). It has also been used unconditionally [that is, about all things] where He says: *And there is not a thing but with Us are the treasures of it, and We do not send it down but in a known measure* (15:21).

Another instance where same idea is expressed specifically about the Qur'an is the following: *Surely We have made it an Arabic Quran that you may understand. And surely it is in the original of the Book with Us, truly elevated, solid* (43:3-4).

The act of *tanzīl* has been ascribed to "*the Lord of the worlds*" in order to assert His unity in Lordship. As we have repeatedly said, the polytheists only acknowledged God as the Lord of the lords, but they did not view Him as the Lord of the worlds.

نَزَلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ ﴿١٩٣﴾ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ لِتَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُنْذِرِينَ ﴿١٩٤﴾ بِلِسانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُبِينٍ ﴿١٩٥﴾

(26:193-195) *The Faithful Spirit has descended with it, Upon your heart that you may be of the warners, In plain Arabic language.*

The Faithful Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*) refers to Gabriel, the angel of revelation, because He says: *Whoever is the enemy of Gabriel—for surely he revealed it to your heart by Allah's command* (2:97). Elsewhere He has called him the Holy Spirit (*rūḥ al-qudus*): *Say: The Holy Spirit has revealed it from your Lord with the truth* (16:102).[1] We discussed the meaning of spirit (*al-rūḥ*) in chapters 16 (al-Naḥl) and 17 (al-Isrā').[2]

This spirit has been characterized as "faithful" in order show that he is trustworthy in his mission from God to His Prophet. He does not modify any of God's words by alteration or change of order, whether that

1 Rūḥ al-Qudus literally means "the spirit of sanctity" or "the spirit of holiness" but it is commonly translated as "the Holy Spirit." (Trans.)

2 Under verses 16:102 and 17:85. (Trans.)

be intentionally, unintentionally, or due to forgetting. The same idea is conveyed in the other verse [16:102] by his description as "holy."

***The Faithful Spirit has descended with it* (bihi):** The letter *bāʾ* makes the verb [descend] transitive. That is: "The Faithful Spirit brought it down." Some have said that the letter *bāʾ* shows accompaniment, meaning: "The Faithful Spirit came in its company." However, this is not a possibility because the central theme and focus of the verse is the descent of the Qur'an, not the descent of the spirit—along with the Qur'an.

The pronoun "it" (in *bihi*) refers to the Qur'an as a speech that consists of words that have true meanings. The actual words and letters of the Qur'an are sent down from Him just as their meanings are sent down from Him. This is what is inferred from the apparent meaning of verses such as: *Therefore when We have recited it, follow its recitation* (75:18), and: *These are the communications of Allah which We recite to you with truth* (2:252, 3:108, 45:6).

Therefore we should ignore the statement of those who say: What the Faithful Spirit brought down was only the meanings of the Noble Qur'an; then the Prophet expressed them with plain Arabic words that capture and convey those meanings.

Some exegetes have suggested an even weaker view: Both the meaning and the words of the Qur'an are the composition of the Prophet, which one level of his soul—called the Faithful Spirit—cast upon another level of his soul—called the heart.

Upon your heart that you may be of the warners: The heart (*qalb*) in His Book is characterized by cognition and understanding. Therefore, it refers to the human soul, because that is what has understanding and is the root of all sorts of cognition and will, as opposed to the pine-cone shaped muscle in left side of the chest, which is one of the major organs of the body. This is inferred from many places in His Book such as: *And the hearts rose up to the throats* (33:10), where "the hearts" are the souls; and: *His heart is surely sinful* (2:283), where "His heart" means his soul, because there is no sensible meaning for ascribing sin to a specific body part.

Perhaps the reason why the verse says "upon your heart" instead of "upon you" is to indicate how he received the Qur'an when it was revealed to him. It shows that his soul came in contact with the Spirit [that is, Gabriel] and received the revelation, without the involvement of the physical senses that are means for particular [as opposed to universal]

observations.

In other words, he used to see and hear what was being revealed to him without using his senses of sight and hearing. This is confirmed by some narrations which say that he was overtaken by a semi-coma called *buraḥāʾ al-waḥy* (intensity of revelation). He would see the person [that is, the angel of revelation] and hear his voice just as we see someone and hear his voice, except that unlike our observation, his was not by the employment of the physical senses of sight and hearing.

If what he saw and heard were through physical sight and hearing, then others should have also seen what he saw and heard what he heard, because they also were possessed of sensory sight and hearing. However, this is rejected by reliable and definite narrations, for it often happened that he was overtaken by the severity and intensity of revelation (*buraḥāʾ al-waḥy*) while he was amongst the people, whereby he received revelation while those around him did not realize anything, did not see anyone talking to him, and did not hear what he was being told.

One may say that perhaps God diverted the senses of other people from observing some of the things that his senses observed, namely the unseen matters that are hidden from us. This, however, would destroy the foundation of knowledge and all assertions, because if it is possible for our senses to make such huge errors, then we would not be able to make any assertion, confirm anything, or hold any piece of knowledge. The basis of all statements is self-evident assertions and what is known to be necessarily true, and the key to them are our sensory perceptions. Not to mention that this view is based on the principality of sensory observation—the idea that nothing exists except for what is sensible—which is one of the clearest misconceptions. We had a discussion in the exposition of Chapter 19 (Maryam) about the resemblance (*tamaththul*) of angels which would be helpful here.

Some have said: "The verse specifically identifies the Prophet's heart as the place of descent because the heart [that is, the human soul] is what understands and what is charged with responsibility, as opposed to the body. Nevertheless his heart received revelation through bodily organs such as hearing and sight as means and instruments." The problem with this explanation was discussed above.

Others have said: The Prophet had two aspects: (1) an angelic aspect through which he received; and (2) a human aspect by which he conveyed

the message [to the people]. The verse says that revelation was sent down on his soul because that was his angelic aspect by which he received from the Faithful Spirit. This is why the verse says "*upon your heart*" (26:194) even though it would have been shorter to say "upon you."[1]

This interpretation is also based on the partaking of senses and physical faculties in the receipt of revelation, so it suffers from the same problem that we mentioned above.

A group of exegetes have said: What is meant by heart here is the specific body part, and every from of comprehension and understanding is a function of the same organ.

Some of them have said: Identifying the heart as the place of descending is not meant literally but it involves a stretch on the meaning, because God conveys the Qur'an to Gabriel by creating sound waves; then Gabriel remembers it, brings it down to the Messenger and recites it to him; then he preserves and retains it in his heart. Therefore, it is *as if* Gabriel descends upon his heart.

Some of them have said: Specifying the heart as the place of descent is because the spiritual message first descends upon the soul; then it is transmitted to the heart since there is an link between the two; and then it is transmitted to the brain where it imprints mental forms and concepts on the tablet of the imaginative faculty (*al-mutakhayyilah*).

Some of them have said: Mentioning the heart specifically is to indicate his perfection in intellection, because the verse makes no reference to sensory means and intermediaries in this process such as hearing and sight.

Some of them have said: This indicates the purity and goodness of his heart, because it has become a place of descent for His Book. This also shows the goodness of the rest of his parts and organs, for indeed the heart is the chief and king of the other organs; when the king is righteous, the subjects will also be righteous.

Some of them have said: This expression is because God has distinguished the heart of His Messenger with an exclusive type of hearing and sight. This is to indicate his distinct position relative to others. This view is understood from the verse: *His heart was not untrue in (making him*

1 In other words, revelation was nevertheless a physical descent and encounter, but the verse says "heart" in order to refer to the Prophet's receptive aspect as opposed to his imparting and transmitting aspect. (Trans.)

see) what he saw (53:11).

Most of the above views are unwarranted interpretations that are based on comparing a transcendent event with the physical events that we are accustomed to, and applying the rules of the latter to the former. Such futile speech has led one exegete to say:

The meaning of an angel bringing down the Qur'an is that God inspires His speech to him and teaches him how to recite it while he is in heaven. Then the angel brings it down to the earth, which means a physical descent. This can occur in two ways: (1) The Prophet should cast off his human form and take up an angelic form so that he can receive from the angel. (2) The angel should transform into a human form so that the Prophet may take it from him. The first is more difficult.

I wish I knew what this exegete meant by a human being casting off his human form, taking up an angelic form and becoming an angel, and then returning to human form again. Similarly, what does he mean by the transformation of an angel into a human form? How could these transformations happen while he is assuming each of these two beings to have a completely distinct reality from the other, without any connection between the two in terms of essence or acts? There are also other questionable points in the above that are not hidden to those who contemplate it.

This discussion should be complemented by a comprehensive study on angels and another one on revelation. Perhaps God would assist me to fulfill this [later on].

***…that you may be of the warners* (mundhirīn, from indhār):** That is: That you may be one of callers toward God by warning people of His punishment. This is what is meant by *indhār* in the Qur'an's nomenclature, which is not limited to the prophets and messengers. For example, God describes the believers among jinn as follows: *And when We turned towards you a party of the jinn who listened to the Quran; when they came to it, they said: Be silent. Then when it was finished, they turned back to their people warning (them)* (46:29). And He says about the believers who are possessed of deep knowledge (*fiqh*): *That they may warn their people when they come back to them* (9:122).

According to this verse, the purpose of Qur'an's revelation was that the Prophet may be a warner, not that he may be a prophet or messenger. This is because the verses in this chapter involve a context and theme of warning and threat.

In plain Arabic language: That is: This Book is in clear and understandable Arabic, or that it conveys its message in the most expressive way. This verse describes and qualifies [Gabriel's] act of "descending" [in 26:193]. The meaning is: The Faithful Spirit has descended with it in plain Arabic language.

Some exegetes have given the possibility that this verse describes "warners" [in 26:194]. The meaning would be: "The Faithful Spirit has descended with it upon your heart so that you may be among the Arab prophets, such as Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Ishmael and Shuʿayb who are mentioned in the Qur'an." The first meaning is better.

وَ إِنَّهُ لَفِى زُبُرِ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٩٦﴾

(26:196) ***And most surely it is in the scriptures* (zubur) *of the ancients.***

The pronoun "it" refers to the Qur'an, or to its being sent down to the Prophet. *Zubur* is the plural of *zabūr*, meaning book. The verse means: The news of the Qur'an—or the news of its revelation to you—was given in the books of the previous prophets.

Some exegetes have said: The pronoun "it" refers to the *content* of the Qur'an. That is: Qur'an's *teachings* are found and mentioned in the books of the previous prophets.

There are two problems with this interpretation: (1) The polytheists did not believe in the prophets and their scriptures so that one could argue with them by saying that teachings like monotheism and resurrection are found in the previous scriptures. But if the verse were about a prophecy of the Qur'an and its revelation upon the Prophet [in the previous scriptures], one would have no choice but to accept it [including the polytheists]. (2) It does not comply with the next verse.

أَ وَ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُمْ آيَةً أَنْ يَعْلَمَهُ عُلَماءُ بَنِى إِسْرائِيلَ ﴿١٩٧﴾

(26:197) ***Is it not a sign to them that the learned men of the Israelites know it?***

The pronoun "it" in "know it" refers to the news of the Qur'an or the news of its revelation to the Prophet. That is: To show the authenticity of your prophethood, does it not suffice the polytheists that the learned men among the Israelites know about the Qur'an and/or its revelation, which

is found as good news given in the scriptures of the previous prophets? Indeed the Jews used speak of this and pray for a triumph over the Arabs through it as we discussed under the verse: *And aforetime they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieve* (2:89).

Indeed many Jewish scholars converted to Islam at the time of the Prophet and acknowledged that he had been promised in their scriptures. This chapter is among the first chapters that were revealed in Mecca before the migration. At that time, the enmity of the Jews toward the Prophet had not reached the level that it reached after the migration. Thus, it was expected that they would disclose some of the truth that was with them [in their books], at least in general terms.

وَ لَوْ نَزَّلْناهُ عَلى بَعْضِ الْأَعْجَمِينَ ﴿١٩٨﴾ فَقَرَأَهُ عَلَيْهِمْ ما كانُوا بِهِ مُؤْمِنِينَ﴿١٩٩﴾

(26:198-199) *And if We had revealed it to any of the foreigners* (al-aʿjamīn). *So that he could recite it to them, they would not have believed therein.*

[Al-Rāghib in] *al-Mufradāt* says:

> *ʿUjmah* is the opposite of clarity (*ibānah*). *Iʿjām* means "ambiguity" (*ibhām*)…*ʿAjam* is the opposite of Arab, and *ʿajamī* is that which is ascribed to non-Arabs. *Aʿjam* is one who has some ambiguity and unclearness in his speech, irrespective of being an Arab or not. This is based on the Arab's lack of understanding of what non-Arabs (*al-ʿajam*) say. Thus they call animals *ʿajmāʾ* [because they are speechless]. *Aʿjamī* is a person or thing that is ascribed to *ʿajamāʾ* (speechless animals). He says: *And if We had revealed it to any of the foreigners* (al-aʿjamīn) (26:198), which involves the omission of some [two] *yāʾ* letters.

As you can see, this means that *al-aʿjamīn* in this verse was originally *al-aʿjamiyyīn*, but then the letter *yāʾ* that indicates the ascription (*nisbah*) was dropped, as some exegetes have explicitly mentioned.[1] Some others have said that *aʿjam* is an adjective whose feminine form is *ʿajmāʾ*. They are of the form *afʿal faʿlāʾ* which does not have a regular plural form—although the Kūfan grammarians allow the regular plural form for it. Apparently the verse confirms the second explanation, and therefore there

1 The omitted letter *yāʾ* would be stressed, which makes two omitted *yāʾ* letters, as al-Rāghib says. (Trans.)

is no need to say that the verse involves some omission [of *yā*ʾ].[1]

Either way, the context suggests a connection between these two verses and the verse, "*in plain Arabic language*" (26:195), where these two verses provide an explanation and justification for what was said above. The implied meaning is: We revealed it to you in Arabic with clear expression so that they would believe in it and not waver because of not understanding its message. Had We revealed it to some foreigners in a foreign language, then they [the Arabs] would not believe in it, but would reject it due to not understanding its message.

Therefore, what is meant by "its revelation to a foreigner" is its revelation in a foreign language. These two verses and the next are similar in meaning to: *And if We had made it a Quran in a foreign tongue, they would certainly have said: Why have not its communications been made clear? What! A foreign (tongue) and an Arab! Say: It is to those who believe a guidance and a healing; and (as for) those who do not believe, there is a heaviness in their ears and it is obscure to them* (41:44).

One exegete has interpreted the verse as follows:

> Had We revealed this Qur'an with the same miraculous and fluent Arabic language to a non-Arab who could not speak Arabic, and then he recited it to them in Arabic correctly as a miracle, then they would still not believe in it due to the extent of their enmity and defiance, even though in that case there would have been two miracles: the miracle of the Qur'an that was recited, and the miracle of its reciter. Some exegetes have said, "It means that if We had revealed it to some non-Arabs in a foreign language and he had recited it to them, they would not believe in it." However, this interpretation is not correct because it is inconsistent with the purpose of explaining the extent of their enmity and defiance.

The problem with the above is that these two verses connect and match more directly and apparently with the verse, "*in plain Arabic language*" (26:195) than with the context of mentioning their persistent denial and rejection. We already explained this connection above.

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1 In other words, *aʿjamīn* in this verse is the plural of *aʿjam*, which means "one who has some ambiguity and unclearness in his speech." This is more often than not the case of foreigners and non-Arabs, whether they speak their own language or Arabic. It is not the plural of *aʿjamī* in this verse, unlike al-Rāghib's view. (Trans.)

An objection that can be raised against our interpretation is that the pronoun "it" in "*And if We had revealed it to any of the foreigners*" (26:198) refers to this Qur'an which is Arabic. Hence, if the verse means revelation of the Qur'an in a foreign language, then it would be saying "Had we revealed an Arabic text in a foreign language," which does not make sense.

The answer to this objection is that what is meant here is similar to: *Surely We have made it an Arabic Quran that you may understand* (43:3). If we interpret Qur'an here as an Arabic scripture, then the verse would be saying: "We have made an Arabic text Arabic," which does not make sense. However, both verse refer to *al-qurʾān* in its literal sense: "a book that is recited" [not the Qur'an specifically, which is an Arabic book].

كَذٰلِكَ سَلَكْنٰهُ فِي قُلُوبِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٢٠٠﴾

(26:200) *Thus* (kadhālika) *have We caused it to enter* (salaknāhu, from sulūk) *into the hearts of the guilty.*

"Thus" (*kadhālika*) refers to the position of the Qur'an in the sight of the polytheists. The previous verses said that they are averse to it and do not believe in it even though it is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds, it is in plain Arabic as opposed to a foreign language, it is mentioned in the previous scriptures, and it is known to Jewish[1] scholars.

Sulūk means "causing something to enter a path and traverse it." "The guilty" denotes unbelievers and the polytheists. They are described as "the guilty" in order to show the *reason* for what is said here: "We caused it to enter their hearts while it was detested and loathed by them *because* they are guilty." In other words, this is a divine punishment by which God has requited their guilt. This expression also generalizes the verse to include others because the cause [that is, being guilty] is not limited to those at that time.

The implied meaning is: We cause the Qur'an to enter and penetrate the hearts of these polytheists in a way that they turn away from it and disbelieve in it as a punishment for their guilt, and thus shall be the case of every guilty person.

Some exegetes have said: "Thus" refers to the abovementioned attributes of the Qur'an. The meaning is: "We cause the Qur'an to enter and

1 Jewish here means Israelite in general, not Jews specifically as opposed to Christians. (Trans.)

penetrate the hearts of the guilty with the qualities that We mentioned for it." In other words, they will realize that this is a heavenly Book with a miraculous flow that is beyond human capacity; that the scriptures of the ancients bore the good news of it; and that Jewish scholars knew about it. This will complete the proof against them.

However, this interpretation is not likely given the context.

Another suggested interpretation is: The pronoun "it" in "*Thus have We caused it to enter*" (26:200) refers to the rejection and denial of the Qur'an, which was implied in the previous verse: "*they would not have believed therein*" (26:199).

This view, offered in *al-Kashshāf*, is close to our interpretation above, but our interpretation is more precise and refined.

Based on what we said, what is meant by "the guilty" is the polytheists in Mecca, although the verse is generalizable to others because guild is a universal quality. One exegete has said: What is meant by "the guilty" is polytheists of elsewhere and later times, and the meaning is: We will cause it to enter the hearts of other guilty individuals just as We have caused it to enter the hearts of the polytheists of Mecca.

Perhaps what has led this exegete to this interpretation is that otherwise the two sides of the analogy would be the same, while in an analogy one thing should be compared to another. That is why he has interpreted "Thus" (*kadhālika*) as "how the Qur'an has been caused to enter the hearts of the Meccan polytheists," making it the basis of the analogy or what is being compared to (*mushabbahun bihi*). Then the case of other polytheists is being compared (*mushabbah*) with them. However, normally, the individual members of a universal are compared with the universal in order to show that what applies to that universal concept also applies to every member of it.[1]

This brings up another possibility: What is meant by "the guilty" is both the Meccan polytheists and other polytheists, which means that the

1 In other words, the guilty polytheists of Mecca are a subcategory of all guilty people, and the verse is saying that their rejection of the Qur'an is *because* they are characterized by guilt. Hence, even though the author's interpretation involves the identicalness of the two sides of analogy, it is not redundant because it serves to emphasize *their guilt* as the *cause* of their rejection. (Trans.)

article *al-* (lit. "the") is not a definite one.[1] Perhaps the first meaning is more plausible in this context.

لا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ حَتَّى يَرَوُا الْعَذابَ الْأَلِيمَ ﴿٢٠١﴾ فَيَأْتِيَهُمْ بَغْتَةً وَ هُمْ لا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٢٠٢﴾ فَيَقُولُوا هَلْ نَحْنُ مُنْظَرُونَ ﴿٢٠٣﴾

(26:201-203) ***They will not believe in it until they see the painful punishment. And it shall come to them all of a sudden, while they shall not perceive; Then they will say: Shall we be respited?***

These verses are an elaboration and exposition of "*Thus have We caused it to enter…*" (26:200). This is based on the first and third interpretations discussed above. As with the second interpretation, these verses would be a new discussion that is not linked to the previous verse.[2]

…until they see the painful punishment: That is: Until they see the painful punishment that will make them believe out of compulsion and necessity, which is not beneficial. Apparently "painful punishment" means what they will see at the time of death. Some exegetes have given the possibility that it refers to the slaughter that will afflict them on the Day of Badr. However, this does not agree with the inclusion of all polytheists [that is, "the guilty"] under the universality of the statement in the last verse [26:200].

And it shall come to them all of a sudden, while they shall not perceive: This is like an interpretation and clarification for what was said above: *until they see the painful punishment* (26:201). Otherwise, if the punishment does not come to them suddenly and they know about its coming beforehand, they would prepare for it and believe voluntarily before they are forced to believe.

Then they will say: Shall we be respited? This is an expression of

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1 The article *al-* in this case would indicate genus (*jins*). Thus, *al-mujrimīn* would not mean "the guilty ones that were mentioned," but it would mean "all guilty individuals." (Trans.)

2 The second view was the interpretation of "thus" (*kadhālika*) as the rejection of the Meccan polytheists and the rest of the verse as the rejection of other polytheists. The reason why this interpretation would be disconnected from the following verses is that it is a complete meaning in itself, as opposed to the other views where "thus" is not clarified or elaborated and hence the following verses serve to explain it. (Trans.)

regret by them.

أَ فَبِعَذابِنا يَسْتَعْجِلُونَ ﴿٢٠٤﴾

(26:204) ***What! do they still seek to hasten on Our punishment?***

This is a threat and rebuke.

أَ فَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ مَتَّعْناهُمْ سِنِينَ ﴿٢٠٥﴾

(26:205-207) ***Have you then considered if We let them enjoy themselves for years, Then there comes to them that with which they are threatened, That which they were made to enjoy shall not avail them?***

These verses are connected to: *Then they will say: Shall we be respited?* (26:203). The gist of the verse is: Their desire for respite and deferral is a desire for something that does not benefit them and will be of no avail to them even if it were to be granted and what they wished were to happen. This is because their enjoyment for a short or a long period of time will not remove the eternal punishment that has become due for them.

Have you then considered if We let them enjoy themselves for years: That is, a few years that are bound to end.

Then there comes to them that with which they are threatened: That is, the punishment comes to them after the years of respite and postponement.

That which they were made to enjoy: Meaning, their enjoyment for a limited time—*shall not avail them.*

وَ ما أَهْلَكْنا مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ إِلاَّ لَها مُنْذِرُونَ ﴿٢٠٨﴾ ذِكْرى وَ ما كُنَّا ظالِمِينَ ﴿٢٠٩﴾

(26:208-209) ***And We did not destroy any town but it had (its) warners* (mundhirūn), *To remind (them), and We have not been unjust.***

It is most pertinent to say that "*it had warners*" describes the state of "any town" [upon being destroyed], and "to remind" describes the state of "warners" [in their mission to the towns]. The latter could also be the object and action that the "warners" did, because "warners" effectively

means "reminders" (*mudhakkirūn*). The meaning of the verse is clear.[1] The exegetes have some unwarranted interpretations here that we shall skip.

***…and We have not been unjust* (mā kunnā ẓālimīn):** The verse does not say, "We did not do them injustice" (*mā ẓalamnāhum*) but rather says: *We have not been unjust*. This expression indicates that injustice does not befit God's position and status (*shaʾn*). In other words: We are not such that We would ever do injustice; it is never expected of Us to be unjust to them.

This statement justifies the exclusive and restricted sense of what was said before. The implied meaning is: "We did not destroy any town unless it had warners reminding them and therefore fulfilling the argument against them. This is because if We were to destroy them in any other condition, We would have been unjust to them, but it would not befit Us to be unjust to anyone." Hence, the verse is equivalent in meaning to: *Nor do We ever chastise (any people) until We raise a messenger* (17:15).

Discussion about the Negation of Injustice from God

An equivalent meaning and implication of injustice (*ẓulm*) is that a subject does an action or uses something without having authority and ownership over it. It is the opposite of justice (*ʿadl*), which implies using things and acting within one's possessions and jurisdiction.

This shows that the meaning of injustice is never realized in existential subjects, because their actions belong to them existentially. The possibility of some event emanating from a subject existentially is concomitant with that event belonging to that subject, because its existence depends on him and it is never independent of him.

God has absolute and all-encompassing ownership of all things in every aspect. Their very being depends on Him and they have no sovereignty or independence from Him. Thus, anything that He does to them—whether it is pleasant or unpleasant to them, beneficial or harmful—is by no means an act of injustice. You can put it like this: "Whatever He does is just, meaning that it is not wrong. Thus, it is up to Him to do whatever He wills and to judge as He wants." All of this is with regard to the plane of existence (*takwīn*).

He has absolute possession of everything by Himself [not from any

1 The meaning is: We did not destroy any town unless it had received warners who were reminders—or warners who warned them by means of reminders. (Trans.)

external cause or source]. The other existential subjects also have existential possession of their acts, but as per God's bestowal and conferment, such that their possessions fall under His possession as branches of it. Hence, He is the owner of what He has endowed them with, and has dominance over what He has empowered them with.

One of these existential subjects is humankind, who possess their actions, especially their voluntary actions and the free will by which they choose their actions. Each of us finds it clearly in ourselves that we possess free will, meaning the choice to either act or not; if people will, they act, and if they do not will, they do not act. Thus, people find themselves to be free agents who possess the choice to do or not do any given action, meaning that it is possible for these actions to emanate from them.

However, since human beings need to live in societies and communities, they have been forced to let go of some of their freedom in action and abstain from some acts that they would otherwise be able to do. These are the actions that disturb the order of the society, which means the disturbance of their own lives. They are the crimes and offenses that have been forbidden by social laws, tribal customs or government regulations that have been established in societies.

It is also necessary to set some disincentives for those who transgress these laws and orders, conditional on being aware of them and not having any excuse, because otherwise one has no responsibility. Similarly, there should be some incentives for those who respect them and abide by them. The first would be a form of punishment, and the second would be a form of reward. These are needed to establish social order and give credibility to the laws.

Furthermore, it is necessary to have someone appointed over the society and the laws that govern it in order to execute the laws while bearing the accountability, especially with regard to the penal code. Otherwise, if there were no accountability, that person could penalize or not at will; an innocent person could be punished and a criminal freed. That would annul the whole establishment of laws and policies altogether. These are some rational principles that have been generally followed in all human societies since the placement of this species on the earth, as dictated and understood by human nature (*fiṭrah*).

Rational arguments, confirmed by the succession of prophets and messengers, show that social laws and the codes of life must be set by God.

These are a set of laws and duties which the innate human nature (*fiṭrah*) calls for. They ensure happiness in life and maintain the welfare of society.

God is the legislator of this celestial law as well as its executor—in the sense of rewarding and penalizing according to it. These rewards and punishments will be given out upon the return to God [that is, the Resurrection].

God's legislation of these celestial laws and His being their executor necessitate that He makes certain things incumbent on Himself legislatively (*tashrīʿiyyan*)—not existentially (*takwīniyyan*)—so that He would not contradict Himself. That is why He does not neglect or cancel a penalty that is due for some violation; He does not execute an undeserved penalty such as requiting an unaware and ignorant sinner with the same punishment as a defiant and deliberate one; and He does not mete out the oppressor's penalty to the oppressed. Otherwise, that would be injustice from His part; He is high exalted above that.

Perhaps this is meant when they say, "God is capable of doing injustice, but He will certainly not do so." That is because injustice is an imperfection and He is free from that. Therefore, even though the occurrence of injustice from Him is impossible, supposing it is not. This is inferred from: *And We have not been unjust* (26:209); *Surely Allah does not do any injustice to men* (10:44); *And your Lord is not in the least unjust to the servants* (41:46); *So that people should not have a plea against Allah after the (coming of) messengers* (4:165). These verses suggest that it is not that injustice is inapplicable to God, as suggested by those who have interpreted the verse as saying that God will not do an act that would be seen as unjust if someone else did it.

You may object: What you said about the necessity to execute both positive and negative retribution is against what all scholars believe—that it is permissible to forgo a sinner's punishment. The person who metes out punishment has a right over it, and one who possesses some right is allowed to let go of it and not claim it. This is in contrast to rewarding an obedient person, because reward is the worker's right; hence it is not permissible to disregard it. Not to mention that, as it has been said, God's reward for worship and obedience is only out of His grace, not some right that the person is entitled to and deserves. Servants and their actions belong to their masters. Thus, a servant does not own anything to be entitled some reward on it.

The answer is: There is no doubt that sometimes the punishment of a sinner may be dropped based on God's grace, but not always, because that would annul the entire system of legislation, penal codes, and the link between actions and their consequences.

As for the idea that rewarding good deeds is a grace from God because the servant's actions belong to God like the servant himself: This does not contradict another grace by God upon His servant, which is assuming that his actions belong to himself and then setting a reward for it. The Qur'an is full of verses that talk about rewards for righteous deeds. He says: *Surely Allah has purchased from the believers their persons and their property for this—that they shall have Paradise* (9:111).

وَ ما تَنَزَّلَتْ بِهِ الشَّياطِينُ ﴿٢١٠﴾ وَ ما يَنْبَغِي لَهُمْ وَ ما يَسْتَطِيعُونَ ﴿٢١١﴾ إِنَّهُمْ عَنِ السَّمْعِ لَمَعْزُولُونَ ﴿٢١٢﴾

(26:210-212) *And the devils* (shayāṭīn) *have not come down with it. And it behooves them not, and they have not the power to do (it). Most surely they are far removed from hearing it.*

These verses turn to answer two claims by the polytheists: (1) there is a jinn who brings these words to Muḥammad; and (2) he is a poet. God first answers the former claim, where he starts by addressing the Prophet and explaining to him that the Qur'an is not a revelation from devils in order to comfort him. Then He turns to his people and explains to them according to their capacity to understand.

And the devils* (al-shayāṭīn) *have not come down with it: That is: They have not revealed it. This verse is connected to the verse: *And most surely this is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds* (26:192). As we just said, this verse is addressed to the Prophet, as we can infer from its conclusion further below: *So call not upon another god with Allah…* (26:213), where God specifically addresses the Prophet, as we shall discuss later.

The reason why this is addressed only to the Prophet and not his people is that it is based on an argument that his people did not accept due to their disbelief. The argument is: *Most surely they are far removed from hearing it* (26:212).

Shayṭān means "an evil being." Its plural is *shayāṭīn*. Here, what is

meant by *shayāṭīn* (devils, "Satans") is "evil jinn."

And it behooves* (yanbaghī) *them not, and they have not the power to do (it): The pronoun "them" refers to the devils. *Majmaᶜ al-bayān* says concerning the word *yanbaghī*:

> In Arabic when someone says, "It behooves (*yanbaghī*) you to do something" it means that he wants you to do it as a rule of reason. It is derived from *bughyah* which means *ṭalab* (demand, want, seeking).

The reason why it does not behoove them to reveal the Qur'an is that they are evil creatures. They do nothing but evil, corruption, and taking falsehood and presenting it in the form of truth in order to mislead others from God's path with it. But the Qur'an is a true speech which no falsehood can reach. Thus, their satanic nature is not congruous with being the source of sending down the Qur'an to anyone.

…and they have not the power to do (it): That is: They are incapable of sending it down, because it is a heavenly speech that the angels receive from the Lord of Glory and send down by His leave under His watch and protection. He says: *for surely He makes a guard to march before him and after him, So that He may know that they have truly delivered the messages of their Lord, and He encompasses what is with them* (72:27-28). The same idea is also seen in the next verse: *Most surely they are far removed from hearing it* (26:212)

Most surely they are far removed from hearing it: That is: The devils (*shayāṭīn*) are far removed from hearing the news of the heavens and finding out about what goes on in the exalted assembly. As God has mentioned in a few places in His Book, if they want to eavesdrop on it, they will be targeted with shining flames.

فَلا تَدْعُ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلهاً آخَرَ فَتَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُعَذَّبِينَ ﴿٢١٣﴾

(26:213) ***So call not upon another god with Allah, lest you be of those who are punished.***

This verse is addressed to the Prophet. It forbids him from associating others with God as a conclusion to: *And the devils* (shayāṭīn) *have not come down with it…* (26:210). That is: Given that this Qur'an is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds and is not brought down by devils, and given that it prohibits setting partners with God and promises punishment

for doing so—you should not associate anyone with God. Otherwise, the punishment promised in it will reach you, and you will be joined with others who are punished.

The fact that he is infallible by divine protection and it is impossible that he would ever commit a sin does not mean that he cannot be *prohibited* from polytheism either. Just because someone is infallible does not mean that that person cannot receive commands or prohibitions. That person is still subject to injunctions and duties as a human being who has the choice to act or abstain. In and of itself, it is perceivable that the person could either obey or disobey. There are many verses in the Qur'an about injunctions given to the prophets. For example He says about all prophets: *And if they had set up others (with Him), certainly what they did would have become ineffectual for them* (6:88), and He says about the Prophet [Muḥammad]: *Surely if you associate (with Allah), your work would certainly come to naught* (39:65). Both verses involve prohibitions.

Some thinkers have said that injunctions are made in order to perfect the individual; hence they are not applicable once perfection is realized and the person reaches that point, for that would mean actualization of the actualized [which is a logical contradiction]. However, this is a mistake, because the righteous deeds that are enacted by injunctions are the *effects* of the desired perfection in the person. Just as one is supposed to *acquire* spiritual perfection by struggling to abide by its necessities and refrain from its opposites, one must then *maintain* that perfection by maintaining the same injunctions. As long someone is a human being living on the earth, he has no alternative but to bear the load of injunctions and duties. We have already discussed this matter in some of our previous discussions.

وَ أَنْذِرْ عَشِيرَتَكَ الْأَقْرَبِينَ ﴿٢١٤﴾

(26:214) *And warn your nearest relations* (ʿashīrataka al-aqrabīn).

Majmaʿ al-bayān says, "One's *ʿashīrah* is his kin. They are called *ʿashīrah* because he associates with them (*yuʿāshiruhum*) and they associate with him (*yuʿāshirūnahu*)."

The verse specifically mentions his nearest kin and relatives right after forbidding and warning himself against polytheism. This is meant to show that there is no exception, favoritism or bending the rules in the religious call, as opposed to what is commonly found in royal relations.

It shows that there is no difference in the application of warning between the Prophet and his nation, and between his near kin and strangers. They are all God's servants and He is their Master.

وَ اخْفِضْ جَناحَكَ لِمَنِ اتَّبَعَكَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢١٥﴾

(26:215) ***And lower your wings for the believers who follow you.***

That is: Engage yourself with those who believe in you, gather them and join them with yourself with mercy and compassion, just as a bird gathers its chicks around itself by lowering and spreading its wings upon them. This is an indirect expression in the form of a metaphor which we discussed above, where He says: *And lower your wings for the believers* (15:88).

"Following" here means obedience, based on the next verse:

فَإِنْ عَصَوْكَ فَقُلْ إِنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢١٦﴾

(26:216) ***But if they disobey you, then say: Surely I am clear of what you do.***

The gist of these two verses [216 & 217] is: If they believe in you and follow you, then gather them around yourself by mercy and teach them; but if they disobey you, then dissociate yourself from their actions.

وَ تَوَكَّلْ عَلَى الْعَزِيزِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿٢١٧﴾

(26:217) ***And rely on the Mighty, the Merciful.***

That is: You are only responsible for what We have made incumbent on you, not for whether or not they obey. It is all up to God to decide about their case. He will punish the sinners according to His might, and He will save the obedient believers according to His mercy.

Mentioning the two names—*the Mighty, the Merciful*—is evocative of the previous stories which ended by these two noble names one after another. This effectively means: In the case of the sinners and their followers, you should rely on God, for He is the Mighty, the Merciful, Who did what He did to the people of Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Abraham, Lot and Shuʿayb, as well as Pharaoh's tribe, as We recounted for you. Their stories show that His custom is to overtake the sinners and save the believers.

الَّذِی یَرَاكَ حِینَ تَقُومُ ﴿۲۱۸﴾ وَ تَقَلُّبَكَ فِی السَّاجِدِینَ ﴿۲۱۹﴾

(26:218-219) ***Who sees you when you stand up. And your movement among those who prostrate themselves [before Allah].***

The apparent meaning that comes to mind first is that "those who prostrate themselves" are the believers in the state of prostration in prayer, while the Messenger of God is among them as they pray in congregation. Then, by contradistinction, "standing up" refers to the state of standing in prayer. The implied meaning is: He is the One Who sees you when you are in the states of standing and prostration. You are under His eye when you pray with the believers—when you stand and prostrate with those who prostrate themselves.

There are some narrations about these verses through Shia and Sunni chains that we shall discuss in the section on the narrations (below), by God's will.

إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِیعُ الْعَلِیمُ ﴿۲۲۰﴾

(26:220) ***Surely He is the Hearing, the Knowing.***

This is an explanation for: *And rely on the Mighty, the Merciful* (26:217).

Based on our explanations, the above verses comfort the Prophet, promise salvation for the believers, and promise punishment for the unbelievers.

هَلْ أُنَبِّئُكُمْ عَلَى مَنْ تَنَزَّلُ الشَّیاطِینُ ﴿۲۲۱﴾ تَنَزَّلُ عَلَى كُلِّ أَفَّاكٍ أَثِیمٍ ﴿۲۲۲﴾
یُلْقُونَ السَّمْعَ وَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ كَاذِبُونَ ﴿۲۲۳﴾

(26:221-223) ***Shall I inform you (of him) upon whom the devils* (shayāṭīn) *descend? They descend upon every lying, sinful one, They cast their hearing, and most of them are liars.***

These verses identify those on whom the devils descend by describing their specific traits in order to show that the Prophet is not one of them and that the Qur'an was not inspired by the devils. This is addressed to the polytheists.

Shall I inform you (of him) upon whom the devils* (shayāṭīn) *descend? The verse is effectively saying: Should I introduce to you those whom the

devils among jinn descend upon with news [from the unseen]?

***They descend upon every lying, sinful one* (affākin athīmin):** *Majmaᶜ al-bayān* says:

> *Affāk* means "liar" (*kadhdhāb*).[1] The root meaning of *ifk* is "to turn upside down" [as in forging and faking]. *Affāk* is one who frequently turns news from truth to falsehood.

Athīm means "evil-doer." *Athima*, *yaʾthamu*, *ithman* is used when one commits an evil deed. *Taʾaththama* means "to forsake *ithm* (evil, sin)."

The devils have no job but to show falsehood in the form of the truth and to adorn evil with a beautiful appearance. Thus they only descend on one who is [also] a sinful liar.

***They cast their hearing* (al-samᶜ):** Apparently the pronouns "they," "their" and "them" refer to the devils. *Samᶜ* is an infinitive [that is, to hear] that here means the object of hearing (*masmūᶜ*: that which is heard). It refers to what the devils hear of the news of the heavens, although it is incomplete because they are prevented from eavesdropping and are shot with shining flames. Thus, whatever they eavesdrop would be imperfect and incomplete. That is why there are a lot of lies in it.[2]

…and most of them are liars: That is: Most devils are liars and do not ever tell the truth. This meaning is based on interpreting "most of them" as "most of their persons." It could also mean "most of their revelations." In other words, those of them who bring news [of the unseen] are mostly liars, meaning that their news is mostly lies.

The gist of these three verses is: Since the devils have an evil nature, they only descend on sinful liars, and they are mostly liars in their news. However, the Prophet is not a sinful liar, nor is the speech that is revealed to him a lie or a deviation from the truth. Hence: (1) he is not one of those upon whom the devils descend; (2) the one who descends on him is not a devil; and (3) the Qur'an (lit. "recitation") that has been revealed to him is not a revelation of the devils.

وَ الشُّعَراءُ يَتَّبِعُهُمُ الْغاوُونَ ﴿٢٢٤﴾ أَ لَمْ تَرَ أَنَّهُمْ فِي كُلِّ وادٍ يَهِيمُونَ ﴿٢٢٥﴾ وَ

1 *Affāk* and *kadhdhāb* are both in the form of *faᶜᶜāl* which is an exaggerated form showing breadth, stability and strength. (Trans.)

2 An alternative meaning that most English translators have chosen is: "They give ear, but most of them are liars." Therefore, the first part refers to their eavesdropping (15:18, 37:8-10, 72:9). (Trans.)

أَنَّهُمْ يَقُولُونَ ما لا يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٢٢٦﴾

(26:224-226) ***And as for the poets, those who go astray*** **(al-ghāwūn, from ghayy)** ***follow them. Do you not see that they wander about bewildered in every valley? And that they say that which they do not do.***

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These verses answer the polytheists' accusation that the Prophet was a poet. The Prophet is given this answer after the above verses which answered their claim that the devils have revealed the Qur'an to him.

They used to repeat these two accusations—that there are some jinn who come to him, and that he is a poet—in Mecca before the migration in order to counter his true call. This confirms that these verses were revealed in Mecca, not in Medina as some exegetes have claimed.

Furthermore, these are the concluding verses of the chapter, which ends with: *and they who act unjustly shall know to what final place of turning they shall turn back to* (26:227). It does not make sense that one of the earliest chapters revealed in Mecca would be left incomplete for so many years and only be completed in Medina. Also, there is no evidence in the next verse [*Except those who believe…*] that it refers to believing poets after the migration (that is, poet believers in Medina).

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Either way, *ghayy* is the opposite of *rushd* which means "to arrive at the truth." *Rashīd* is one whose only concern is with what is true and real. *Ghawī* is one who pursues the path of falsehood and deviates from the way of truth. Distortion of the truth and deviation from the reality (*ghiwāyah*) has a special place in poetics: an art that is based on imagination and giving a real form to something unreal. That is why it is only pursued by a pervert (*ghawī*) who is fascinated by imaginative allurements and illusory forms that distract one from the truth and avert him from rectitude (*rushd*). The poets—whose art is based on straying and deviation—are only followed by those who err and go astray. That is the meaning of: *And as for the poets, those who go astray follow them* (26:224).

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Do you not see that they wander about bewildered **(yahīmūna)** ***in every valley? And that they say that which they do not do:*** *Hāma*, *yahīmu*, *haymānan* is used when someone or something keeps pursuing his own way [instead of pursuing the right path]. The bewilderment of the poets in every valley refers to their total freedom in speech without stopping at any limit. Sometimes they praise something that is false and reprehensible

as something that is true and commendable. Sometimes they libel something fair as if it is the foulest of things. Sometimes they call people to falsehood and keep people from the truth. This involves deviation from the path of the innate human nature (*fiṭrah*) which is based on rectitude and which calls to the truth. Similarly, saying what they do not do in practice is a deviation from the path of *fiṭrah*.

The gist of these three verses is: The Prophet is not a poet because the poets are followed by those who are astray, for their art is founded on error as opposed to rectitude. On the contrary, his followers follow him in search for rectitude, pursuing the fact of the matter, and seeking the truth, for the speech that he has brought [that is, the Qur'an] is a call to the truth and rectitude, not a call to falsehood or error.

إِلاَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَ عَمِلُوا الصَّالِحاتِ وَ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ كَثِيراً وَ انْتَصَرُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ ما ظُلِمُوا وَ سَيَعْلَمُ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا أَيَّ مُنْقَلَبٍ يَنْقَلِبُونَ ﴿٢٢٧﴾

(26:227) ***Except those who believe and do good and remember Allah much, and defend themselves after they are oppressed; and they who act unjustly shall know to what final place of turning they shall turn back to.***

The exception here applies to the poets who were criticized above, and it excepts poets who are believers. Belief and good deeds will naturally stop one from leaving the truth and following falsehood. Frequent remembrance of God makes one mindful of Him, turning to the truth that He pleases and away from the falsehood that He does not approve of engaging in. That is why what was said about the previous group of poets does not apply to them.

This explanation clarifies why the exemption is qualified by faith and doing good, and then complemented by: *and remember Allah much* (26:227).

…and defend themselves **(intaṣarū, from intiṣār)** ***after they are oppressed:*** *Intiṣār* means *intiqām* (vengeance, revenge). According to some exegetes, it refers to the poems that Muslim believers composed in response to the polytheists who had composed poems insulting the Prophet (s.a.w), attacking the religion, and expressing how they despised Islam and Muslims. This is a good interpretation, and it is supported by the current context.

…and they who act unjustly shall know to what final place of turning they shall turn back to* (munqalabin yanqalibūna)*: *Munqalab* is a locative noun or an infinitive. The meaning is: Those who act unjustly—that is, the polytheists, as it is understood from the context—will soon know the place of turning and recourse where they will return and end, which shall be the Fire. Alternatively [if *munqalab* is an infinitive] it means: They will soon know what kind of turning they will have.

This is a threat to the polytheists. It also makes a connection between the end of the chapter and its beginning where He says: *So they have indeed rejected (the truth); therefore, the news of that which they mock shall soon come to them* (26:6).

Examining Narrations

(1) It is narrated from either of the two [Imams al-Bāqir or al-Ṣādiq] upon being asked about "*in plain Arabic language*" (26:195): It [Arabic] can express the other languages, but the other languages cannot express it.[1]

(2) Concerning "*And if We had revealed it to any of the foreigners…*" (26:198), Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Had the Qur'an been revealed to non-Arabs, the Arabs would not believe in it, but now that it has been revealed to Arabs, the non-Arabs have believed in it. This is the merit of non-Arabs.[2]

(3) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: The Messenger of God saw in a dream that the Umayyads had climbed on his pulpit and were misleading the people backwards from the straight path. He woke up extremely grieved and distressed…
Then Gabriel descended and said, "O Messenger of God! Why do I see you so grieved and distressed?" He answered, "O Gabriel! Last night I dreamt that the Ummayads were climbing on my pulpit after me and misleading the people backwards from the straight path." Gabriel said, "By the One Who has truly appointed

1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of al-Ḥajjāl, from someone that he mentioned.

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.

you as a prophet, I am not aware of this." Then he [Gabriel] ascended to the heaven and it was not long before he came down to him [the Prophet] with some verses of the Qur'an to comfort him. He said: *Have you then considered if We let them enjoy themselves for years, then there comes to them that with which they are threatened, that which they were made to enjoy shall not avail them?* (26:205-207). He also revealed to him: *Surely We revealed it on the Night of Ordainment. And what will make you comprehend what the Night of Ordainment? The Night of Ordainment is better than a thousand months* (97:1-3). God has made the Night of Ordainment better for His Prophet than the thousand months of the Umayyad reign.[1]

(4) Ibn Abī Ḥātim, from Abū Jahḍam said: Once the Prophet looked as if he was helpless and perplexed. When they [his Companions] asked about it he said, "Why not, when I have dreamt that my enemy will take control of my nation after me?" Then these verses were revealed, and thus he was appeased: *Have you then considered if We let them enjoy themselves for years, then there comes to them that with which they are threatened, that which they were made to enjoy shall not avail them?* (26:205-207).[2]

Author's comment: "Why not, when I have dreamt…" involves an implied omission, such as "Why should I not be like this when I have dreamt?"

(5) Abū Hurayrah said: When the verse, "*And warn your nearest relations*" (26:214) was revealed, the Messenger of God started calling the Quraysh (to his message). He called them both generally and specifically, whereby he said: "O community of Quraysh, save yourselves from the Fire, for indeed your harm and benefit are not in my hands. O descendants of Kaʿb ibn Luʾayy, save yourselves from the Fire, for indeed your harm and benefit are not in my hands. O descendants of Quṣayy, save yourselves from the Fire, for indeed your harm and benefit are not in my hands. O

1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā al-Qammāṭ.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*.

descendants of ᶜAbd Manāf, save yourselves from the Fire, for indeed your harm and benefit are not in my hands. O descendants of ᶜAbd al-Muṭṭalib, save yourselves from the Fire, for indeed your harm and benefit are not in my hands. O Fāṭimah, daughter of Muḥammad, save yourself from the Fire, for indeed your harm and benefit are not in my hands. Lo! You indeed have a right of kinship [over me] and soon I shall fulfill its due right."[1]

(6) Ibn ᶜAbbās said: When "*And warn your nearest relations*" (26:214) was revealed, he [the Prophet] started calling them tribe by tribe.[2]

(7) Ibn ᶜAbbās said: When "*And warn your nearest relations*" (26:214)—and the chosen ones among your kin—was revealed, the Prophet went out and climbed Mount al-Ṣafā. Then he cried out: "*Yā ṣabāḥāh*!"[3] The people asked each other, "Who is it that is calling out?" They were told, "It is Muḥammad." So they all gathered around him, and if someone could not come, they sent someone else to see what was happening.

The Quraysh—including Abū Lahab—came and he said, "Would you accept it from me if I told you that there is an army in this valley [behind the mountain] that wants to raid you?" They said, "Of course. We have not seen anything but honesty from you." He said, "So now be informed that I am a warner to you before a severe chastisement." At that point Abū Lahab said, "May perdition overtake the rest of your day! Is that why you gathered us here?" That is when it was revealed: *Perdition overtake both hands of Abū Lahab, and he will perish* (111:1).[4]

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad, ᶜAbd b. Ḥamīd, al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn Mardawayh and al-Bayhaqī's *Shuᶜab al-Īmān* and al-*Dalāʾil*.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ᶜAbd b. Ḥamīd and Ibn Mardawayh.

3 This is an expression of warning to prepare for an attack by enemies. Plunderers usually used to raid in the mornings. Also, when there was a war they used to stop fighting at night and resume in the morning. Therefore, *yā ṣabāḥāhu* (lit. "Lo! The morning has arrived") effectively means "watch out for the enemy." See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ᶜArab*, under *ṣ-b-ḥ*.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Saᶜīd b. Manṣūr, al-Bukhārī, Ibn

(8) Abū Amāmah said: When "*And warn your nearest relations*" (26:214) was revealed, the Messenger of God gathered Banū Hāshim and had them in front of his house, and he gathered his womenfolk and had them sit inside the house. He then rose among them and said, "O children of Hāshim! Secure yourselves from the Fire, strive to free yourselves, and obtain this from God by submitting yourselves [to Him], for indeed I do not control anything for you against God."

He then turned to his household and said, "O ʿĀʾishah daughter of Abū Bakr! O Ḥafṣah daughter of ʿUmar! O Umm Salamah! O Fāṭimah daughter of Muḥammad! O Umm Zubayr, the aunt of God's Messenger! Secure yourselves from God and strive to free yourselves, for indeed I do not control anything for you against God and cannot avail you…"[1]

Author's comment: There are other narrations similar to the above. In some of them he specifically addressed his warning to the children of ʿAbd Manāf, which would include both Banū Umayyah and Banū Hāshim.

The first three narrations above do not match the verse because they pertain to warning the Quraysh in general while the verse explicitly says "*warn your nearest relations*" (26:214), which would be either the children of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib or the children of Hāshim. The second narration is least compatible with the verse because it says: "He started calling them tribe by tribe."

Furthermore, as we said above, what is meant by the verse is that their close relationship with the Prophet does not mean that they do not need to fear God (that is, to have *taqwā*). The narrations refer to this idea where they say, "I cannot avail you anything against God." This idea does not comply with the call being a public one that includes other than his near kin.

Concerning the fourth narration, it should be noted that the verse "*And warn your nearest relations*" (26:214) is a Meccan verse in a Meccan chapter. No one has claimed that this verse was revealed in Medina. Where were ʿĀʾishah, Ḥafṣah and Umm Salamah when this verse was revealed? The Prophet only married them in Medina?

Thus, what is reliable in the above narrations is that he specifically

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Mardawayh, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Ṭabarānī and Ibn Mardawayh.

called Banū Hāshim or Banū ʿAbd Muṭṭalib when this verse was revealed. It is surprising that, after quoting these narrations, al-Ālūsī says, "If these narrations are all authenticated, then we should accept all of them by saying that there were multiple sessions and missions of warning."

(9) Barāʾ b. ʿĀzib said: When this verse was revealed, the Messenger of God gathered the descendants of ʿAbd al- Muṭṭalib. They were forty men at the time, each of whom would eat a whole platter and drink a large basin. He ordered ʿAlī to get a sheep leg and make stew with it. He then told them, "Sit and eat, in the name of God!" They came and sat in groups of ten and ate up to satiation. He then called for a container of milk, drank a few sips from it, and told them, "Drink, in the name of God!" They all drank to satiation. Then Abū Lahab jumped in and said, "This is how this man is bewitching you." Thus he remained silent on that day and did not say anything.

The next day he called them again to a similar feast of food and drink. Then the Messenger of God warned them and said, "O children of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib! Indeed I am a warner for you from God. Submit and follow me that you may be guided."

He then added, "Now, who will accept to be a brother to me in this, to help me with this load, to be my heir and successor, to be my deputy over my household, and to pay my debts after me?" Everyone remained silent. He repeated this three times and every time they remained silent except for ʿAlī who said the third time, "I will." Then the people got up to leave while they were telling Abū Ṭālib, "You should obey your son now, because he has been given authority over you!"[1]

(10) Al-Suyūṭī narrates a similar hadith to the previous account (from Barāʾ) through various chains from ʿAlī where he says: Then the Prophet said, "O children of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib! By God I do not know any of the Arabs who brought for their tribe anything better than what I have brought for you. Indeed I have brought to you the good of this world and the hereafter, and God has

1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of *Tafsīr al-Thaʿlabī*, via its chain of narration.

commanded me to call you to it. Now, which one of you would help me in this mission of mine?" I said, although I was the youngest of them, "I would!" Then they got up to leave while they were laughing [in derision].[1]

(11) Al-Ṭabrisī says [in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*]: This story has been narrated from Abū Rāfiʿ. In his account it says: He gathered them in the Shiʿb [of Abū Ṭālib in Mecca] and cooked a sheep leg for them, which they ate from to satiation. And he gave them a basin [of milk] to drink from and they all drank up to satiation.
Then he said, "Indeed God has commanded me to warn my relatives and kin. Indeed, every prophet that God has sent appointed someone from his family to be his brother, vizier, inheritor, successor and deputy in his family. Which one of you people would pledge allegiance to me to be my brother, inheritor, vizier and successor, and that your position to me would be like Aaron's position to Moses?"
ʿAlī said, "I would."
The Prophet told him, "Come here," where he opened his mouth and placed some of his saliva in his [ʿAlī's] mouth and also rubbed it between his shoulders and on his chest.
Abū Lahab said, "Such a bad reward that you have given your cousin for responding to your call. You have filled his mouth and face with your spittle!"
He said, "I filled him with wisdom and knowledge."

(12) ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib said: When the verse "*And warn your nearest relations*" (26:214)—that is, "the chosen ones among your kin"—was revealed, the Messenger of God summoned the descendants of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, who were at the time more or less forty men. He told them, "Which one of you will be my brother, inheritor, my vizier, my successor and my deputy among you after me?" He offered this to each of them one by one, but they all declined, until he reached me. There I said, "I will, O Messenger of God." So he said, "O children of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib! This is my inheritor, vizier and deputy among you after me." They got up laughing to

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Isḥāq, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn Mardawayh, Abū Nuʿaym and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Dalāʾil*.

each other and telling Abū Ṭālib: "He just ordered you to listen to and obey this boy!"[1]

Author's comment: It can be deduced from "that is, the chosen ones among your kin" that the alternative recitation of the verse as "And warn your nearest relations and the chosen ones among your kin" which has been attributed to the Ahl al-Bayt is an *interpretation* of the verse [not an alternative recitation]. The same recitation has been attributed to the Qur'an of Ubayy b. Kaʿb.

(13) Concerning verse 26:219 (*And your movement among those who prostrate themselves*), *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: This has been interpreted as "the transmission of your seed through the chain of the monotheists who prostrate"; that is, from one prophet to the next, until He brought you out as a prophet. This has been narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās by ʿAṭāʾ and ʿIkrimah.

(14) It is also narrated from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq: [It means] the loins of prophets, one prophet after another, until He brought him out from the loin of his father, all through marriage and without any taint of adultery since Adam.

Author's comment: This has been narrated from other Shia narrators as well. It has also been reported in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn Mardawayh, Abū Nuʿaym and others, from Ibn ʿAbbās and others.

(15) Imam al-Bāqir said: The Messenger of God said, "Do not raise [your heads from prostration and/or bow] before I do, and do not place [your heads on the ground in prostration] before I do, for indeed I see you from my back just as I see you from my front." Then he recited this verse [26:219].[2]

Author's comment: What is meant here is raising the forehead from the earth and placing it on the earth in prostration. This has also been reported in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, from Ibn ʿAbbās and others.

(16) Abū Saʿīd said: We were traveling with the Messenger of God

1 *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAbd-Allāh b. al-Ḥārith b. Nūfil.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Jābir.

when a poet came up to us singing a poem. The Prophet said to us, "It is better if you fill your belly [that is, inside, heart] with pus than filling it with poetry."[1]

Author's comment: This has also been reported through Shia chains, from Imam al-Ṣādiq, from the Prophet.

(17) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says [concerning verses 26:225-226]: They admonish the people but do not observe admonition themselves. They forbid evil but they do not refrain from it themselves. They enjoin good but they do not do it themselves. They are those whom God has described: *Do you not see that they wander about bewildered in every valley?* (26:225). That is, they go in every way. *And that they say that which they do not do* (26:226): They are those who usurped the right of Muḥammad's family.

(18) [Imam] al-Ṣādiq was once asked about God's words: *And as for the poets, those who go astray follow them* (26:224). He said: "These are the storytellers."[2]

Author's comment: The storytellers are one example and application of the general meaning that we discussed in the exposition of the verse.

(19) The Prophet said: Indeed there is wisdom in some poetry, and some speech is magic.[3]

Author's comment: *Al-Durr al-manthūr* has narrated the first sentence also on the authority of Ibn Abī Shaybah, on the authority of Buraydah and Ibn ʿAbbās, from the Prophet; and on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah, from the Prophet. The words there are: "Indeed some poetry is wisdom."

Commendable poetry is that which supports the truth, which is not what is being condemned in these verses [26:224-226].

(20) Kaʿb b. Mālik once said: "O Messenger of God! What do you say about poets?"

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Shaybah and Aḥmad.

2 Al-Ṣadūq's *al-Iʿtiqādāt*.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Shaybah, on the authority of Ibn Masʿūd.

He replied, "Indeed a believer does jihad both by his sword and by his tongue. By the One in Whose hand is my life, [by your true poems] it is as if you shed their blood with arrows."[1]

After narrating the above, Ṭabrisī adds: The Prophet told Ḥassān b. Thābit: "Speak against them—or speak back against them—and the Holy Spirit will be with you."

Author's comment: This has been narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim in their two *Ṣaḥīḥs*.

(21) Abū al-Ḥasan Sālim al-Barrād said: When the verses "*And as for the poets…*" (26:224-226) were revealed, ʿAbd-Allāh b. Rawāḥah, Kaʿb b. Mālik and Ḥassān b. Thābit came to the Prophet weeping. They said, "O Messenger of God! God has revealed this verse, and He knows that we are poets. Are we doomed?"

Then God revealed: *Except those who believe and do good* (26:227). So the Messenger of God summoned them and recited it for them.[2]

Author's comment: This narration and narrations similar to it have led some exegetes to hold the view that the five last verses of this chapter were revealed in Medina, but we already discussed its implausibility in our exposition.

(22) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Among the most difficult of what God has made obligatory upon His creatures is to remember God much. Then he added: I do not mean saying "Glory be to God; praise belongs to God; there is no god but God; and God is the Greatest," although these are also part of it, but what I mean is remembering God when one comes across what He has made lawful or unlawful, then doing it if it is an act of obedience, and refraining from it if it is an act of disobedience.[3]

Author's comment: This confirms what we said in the exposition of the verse.

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-Zuhrī.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Shaybah, ʿAbd ibn Ḥamīd, Abū Dāwūd's *Nāsikh*, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, and Ibn Mardawayh.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū ʿUbaydah.

Chapter 27

Al-Naml (The Ant)

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Verses 1-6

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

The main theme of this chapter is to warn the people and give them glad tidings, as shown by its starting verses and its five ending verses. To do so, it discusses some parts of the stories of Prophets Moses, David, Solomon, Ṣāliḥ and Lot. Then it continues by addressing some fundamental religious teachings such as the unity of God in Lordship, and the Resurrection.

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طس تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْقُرْآنِ وَ كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿١﴾

(27:1) Ṭā Sīn! *These* (tilka) *are the verses of the Qur'an and clear Book.*

As mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 26 (al-Shuʿarāʾ), "these" (*tilka*) refers to the verses of this chapter that will be revealed, as well as the Qur'anic verses revealed before. *Tilka* is a demonstrative pronoun which is particularly used for far-off objects. Its usage here shows that these verses are lofty and out of reach.

This book is called a *qurʾān* because it is recited (*maqruww*). *Mubīn* is derived from *ibānah*, which means "to show, to reveal, to manifest." The word "Book" (*kitābin*) is in the indefinite form, which shows esteem and magnification. It means: These noble verses that We reveal are the verses of a grand, recited book that is clear and unambiguous about its objectives.

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Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> The two descriptions of *qurʾān* and *kitāb* indicate that this Book is communicated through both recitation and writing. It is as if the Book speaks through its recitation and its writing. Its description as *mubīn* (clear, clarifying, lucid) compares the Book to a speaker

who has this quality [of being eloquent and expressive].

هُدىً وَ بُشْرى لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢﴾

(27:2) ***A guidance* (hudā) *and good news* (bushrā) *for the believers.***

Hudā (guidance) and *bushrā* (good news) are verbal nouns that serve as a nominative case (*fāʿil*) here.[1] It could also be that the verse uses verbal nouns instead of subjects to show emphasis.[2]

الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلاةَ وَ يُؤْتُونَ الزَّكاةَ وَ هُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٣﴾

(27:3) ***Who keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate, and who are sure of the hereafter.***

This verse refers to performing righteous deeds. It only mentions the prayer and the poor-rate because each heads a category: The prayer represents what pertains to God, and the poor-rate represents what relates to the people. Alternatively, the prayer represents bodily acts of devotion, and the poor-rate represents financial acts of devotion.

… *and who are sure of the hereafter:* This is another description of the believers which is connected to the previous part. It show that the aforementioned righteous deeds are properly placed and bear fruit only if they are done with certainty in the hereafter. Otherwise, denying the hereafter annuls one's actions. God says: *And (as to) those who reject Our signs and the meeting in the hereafter, their deeds are null* (7:147).

… *and who* (hum) *are sure of the hereafter, are they* (hum): Repeating the pronoun *hum* (that is, repeating "are they" in addition to "who") indicates that such certainty is part and parcel of their status. In other words, such certainty is could only be expected of them.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ لا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ زَيَّنَّا لَهُمْ أَعْمالَهُمْ فَهُمْ يَعْمَهُونَ ﴿٤﴾

(27:4) ***As for those who do not believe in the hereafter, We have surely made their deeds fair-seeming to them, but they blindly***

1 That is, "guidance" (*hudā*) means "guide" (*hādī*), and "good news" (*bushrā*) means "giver of good news" (*mubashshir*). (Trans.)

2 In Arabic, when a quality is so strong and vivid in a person, sometimes the person is called by the verbal noun of that quality. For example, when Zayd is very just, instead of saying "Zayd is just," it is said, "Zayd is justice." (Trans.)

wander on **(yaʿmahūn, from ʿamah)**.

ʿAmah means *taḥayyur* (confusion, hesitation). "Making a deed fair-seeming to someone" means making the acts appeal to the person, such that the person is attracted to do it. This world is a path and the hereafter is its destination. Not believing in the hereafter means being left in this world—the path—without any goal or purpose. Thus they are left wandering in this life while clinging to their acts.

أُولٰٓئِكَ الَّذِينَ لَهُمْ سُوءُ الْعَذابِ وَ هُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ هُمُ الْأَخْسَرُونَ ۝٥

(27:5) ***These are they who shall have an evil punishment, and in the hereafter they shall be the greatest losers.***

Since the second part of the verse talks about loss in the hereafter, "evil punishment" includes both worldly and otherworldly punishments. Perhaps the reason why they are "the greatest losers" is that other sinners [that is, those who are believers] have both evil deeds and righteous deeds in their records, and they will be requited for both. However, in the case of the disbelievers, their wrongdoings are recorded against them, while their good deeds are annulled.

وَ إِنَّكَ لَتُلَقَّى الْقُرْآنَ مِنْ لَدُنْ حَكِيمٍ عَلِيمٍ ۝٦

(27:6) ***And most surely you are made to receive*** **(la-tulaqqā, from talqiyah)** ***the Qur'an from One All-Wise, All-Knowing.***

Talqiyah is close in meaning to *talqīn* (dictate, impart). The divine names "All-Wise" and "All-Knowing" are indefinite to indicate esteem and magnification. The verse clearly attributes the Qur'an to God, which proves the Prophet as a messenger sent from God. This confirms the teachings mentioned before, and authenticates the stories of the prophets that will come afterwards.

The verse particularly points out two of God's names: *All-Wise, All-Knowing*. The first name shows that this Book is sent from the spring of wisdom; thus, it cannot be negated or weakened. The second name shows that the Book has been sent from the source of knowledge, so it neither lies in what it says nor errs in its judgments.

Verses 7-14

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This is the first of five stories discussed in this chapter, which are presented as evidence for the glad tidings and warnings that were mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. The first three stories emphasize glad tidings, while the last two stories emphasize warnings.

إِذْ قَالَ مُوسى لِأَهْلِهِ إِنِّي آنَسْتُ ناراً سَآتِيكُمْ مِنْها بِخَبَرٍ أَوْ آتِيكُمْ بِشِهابٍ قَبَسٍ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَصْطَلُونَ ﴿٧﴾

(27:7) ***When Moses said to his family: Surely I see*** **(ānastu, from īnās)** ***fire; I will bring you*** **(sa-ātīkum, from ityān)** ***from it some news, or I will bring to you*** **(ātīkum)** ***therefrom a burning firebrand*** **(bi-shihāb qabas)** ***so that you may warm yourselves*** **(taṣṭalūna, from iṣṭilā[2]).**

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"His family" means his wife, who was the daughter of Shuʿayb (Jethro, Reuel) as God says in Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ.[1] *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says,

Using a plural pronoun ["you" in "I will bring to you" and "so that you may warm yourselves"] is because one person gives the composure and assurance of a group in the wilderness or in fear.

It is also possible that they were accompanied by others, like a servant or horseman. *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says,

Īnās means *ibṣār* (seeing). It has been said that *ānastu* means "I feel something" but specifically in the sense that one feels intimate with it. *Mā ānasta bihi* means "something that you feel comfortable about."

Here are a few definitions for *shihāb*: (1) According to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, it means a light that is like a column of fire. More generally, any light that extends like a column is called *shihāb*. Here, it means "a flame from a fire." (2) According to *al-Mufradāt*, *shihāb* refers to a flame that flares up from a fire that is well kindled and stable, or the flames that erupt from cosmic clouds. *Al-Mufradāt* defines *qabas* as "a fire that is taken from a flame."

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1 See verses 28:27-29. (Trans.)

Iṣṭilāʾ, when used with fire, means "warming oneself with it."

The theme and context of these verses indicate that Moses and his family were cold and had lost their way in a very dark night while traveling. This is confirmed by his story in the other chapters. Then he saw a fire from afar, so he decided to go toward it. If he found someone there, he could ask for directions, or he else he could bring a firebrand to his family so that they could make a fire and warm themselves. So he told his family, "Wait! I sense and see a fire. Stay here; I will soon come from it with news by which we can find our way, or I will come with a firebrand from it so you can make a fire and warm yourselves."

The context of the verses also suggests that the fire was only visible to him and not others. Otherwise he would have pointed to it instead of referring to it in an indefinite form.

… I will bring to you from it some news, or I will bring to you therefrom a burning firebrand…: Here, Moses repeats "*I will bring to you*," perhaps because he refers to two different types of bringing: (1) bringing information; and (2) bringing fire.[1]

فَلَمَّا جاءَها نُودِيَ أَنْ بُورِكَ مَنْ فِي النَّارِ وَ مَنْ حَوْلَها وَ سُبْحانَ اللَّهِ رَبِّ الْعالَمِينَ ﴿٨﴾

(27:8) ***So when he came to it he was called: blessed be*** **(būrika)** ***whoever is in the fire and whoever is about it; and glory be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.***

That is: When he went to the fire and arrived there, it was called out…

The verbal noun *mubārakah* means "giving abundant good." *Bārakahu*, *bāraka ʿalayhi* and *bāraka fīhi* mean "he bestowed abundant good upon someone and blessed him with it." This part of the story is expressed in Sūrah Ṭā-Hā: *So when he came to it, a voice uttered: O Moses! Surely I am your Lord. Therefore, take off your shoes; surely you are in the sacred valley, Ṭuwā. And I have chosen you, so listen to what is revealed* (20:11-13). These verses suggest that "*whoever is about the fire*" was Moses, or at least he was among them; and his "blessedness" refers to his being sanctified and

1 The former is bringing something mental: some description, instruction, knowledge; while the latter is bringing something physical: a burning piece of wood. (Trans.)

chosen [as a messenger].

Here are a few other suggested interpretations by the exegetes:

"*Whoever is in the fire*" refers to God, as the One Who has manifested His authority and power in the fire. The voice came from the tree—as per the verses in Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ[1]—which the fire circled. The meaning would be: "Blessed is the One Who has manifested to you by His speech through the fire and has blessed you." Based on this interpretation, the last part of the verse then—"*glory be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds*"—is meant to clarify that God is free from physical properties such as having a body, being located in space, or being affected by phenomena. Unlike what some exegetes have said, this last sentence is not meant to raise the astonishment and admiration of Moses.

"*Whoever is in the fire*" refers to the angels who were present there, and "*whoever is about it*" refers to Moses.

Some have said the exact opposite: in the fire was Moses, and around it were the angels.

The verse involves an elided clause which has been omitted [for the sake of rhetoric]. The implied meaning is: "Blessed be he who is in *the place where* the fire is." The "blessed spot" (*al-buqʿat al-mubārakah*) would be where the tree was located, as mentioned in Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ.[2] The person there was Moses; the area around it was the Holy Land (that is, the Levant);[3] and the ones there were the prophets living there who were descendants of Abraham and Jacob.

"*Whoever is in the fire*" refers to God's light, and "*whoever is about it*" refers to Moses.

"*Whoever is in the fire*" refers to the tree, because that is what was encompassed by the fire, and "*whoever is about it*" refers to the angels who were glorifying God.

However, most of these interpretations are not exempt from the imposition of personal opinions.

يا مُوسى إِنَّهُ أَنَا اللَّهُ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٩﴾

1 See verse 28:30. (Trans.)

2 See verse 28:30. (Trans.)

3 The Holy Land starts from the end of the Sinai desert toward the east, including Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. (Trans.)

(27:9) ***O Moses! Surely I am Allah, the Mighty, the Wise.***

Here, God introduces Himself to Moses so that Moses would know that he is talking directly to His Almighty Lord. This verse matches the following verses in Sūrah Ṭā-Hā: *It was called: O Moses! Surely I am your Lord, therefore put off your shoes…* (20:11-12). The reader should refer to Chapter 20 and contemplate those verses.

وَ أَلْقِ عَصاكَ فَلَمَّا رَآها تَهْتَزُّ كَأَنَّها جَانٌّ وَلَّى مُدْبِراً وَ لَمْ يُعَقِّبْ يا مُوسى لا تَخَفْ إِنِّي لا يَخافُ لَدَيَّ الْمُرْسَلُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

(27:10) ***And cast down your staff. So when*** **(fa-lammā)** ***he saw it moving*** **(tahtazzu, from ihtizāz)** ***as if it were a serpent*** **(jānn),** ***he turned back retreating*** **(mudbiran, from idbār)** ***and did not return*** **(lam yuʿaqqib, from taʿqīb)*****: O Moses! Fear not; surely the messengers shall not fear in My presence***

Ihtizāz means "rapid, violent motion." *Jānn* means "a small, fast-moving snake." *Idbār* (turning one's back to someone, going away) is the opposite of *iqbāl* (coming forth, approaching). *Taʿqīb* is to return after escaping; for instance, when a soldier returns [to the battlefield] after fleeing, it is said: *ʿaqqaba al-muqātil*.

The letter *fāʾ* (so, then) in *fa-lammā* (so when) is called *al-fāʾ al-faṣīḥah* (the revealing *fāʾ*). It indicates an implied omission in the verse. The implied clause is: "And cast down your staff. *When he cast it down, it became a serpent moving.* So when he saw it in motion…."

The analogy used in this verse is that of a *jānn* (small, fast snake), while the analogy used in Chapters 7 (al-Aʿrāf) and 26 (al-Shuʿarāʾ) is that of a *thuʿbān* (an enormous snake). These two do not contradict, because they refer to two different aspects and qualities of the snake. In this verse, the staff is likened to a *jānn* on the account of its swiftness. Putting the two analogies together, we can say that the staff became a gigantic, scary serpent that slithered quickly like a small, fast snake (*jānn*). Neither analogy encompasses the entire staff. In other words, the staff is not compared to a *thuʿbān* or *jānn* in all aspects.

It has been said that the staff miraculously transformed differently on different occasions. It first appeared as a *jānn*, as it says in Sūrah Ṭā-Hā: *So he cast it down, and lo! It was a serpent running* (20:20). Later, when he cast it before Pharaoh, it appeared as an obvious *thuʿbān*, as mentioned in

Sūrah al-Aʿrāf and Sūrah al-Shuʿarāʾ.

Although this view agrees with the context of the verses, it suffers from the following problem: Either the staff did not turn into a *ḥayyah* (serpent, snake), or the Qur'an has compared something to itself.[1] The resolution to this problem is best found in our suggested interpretation.

… O Moses! Fear not; surely the messengers shall not fear in My presence: This sentence is a narration of God's address to Moses. It means, "God said: 'O Moses, fear not…'"

"Fear not" is a command which implies that he is secure from any evil that could cause fear. Such absolute security is enjoyed when a person is at the threshold of divine proximity and in direct conversation with God. It is not limited to a specific form of fear, such as fear of the staff. The reason for why he should have no fear is explained as follows: *Surely the messengers shall not fear in My presence* (27:10). This statement of total security is qualified by "*in My presence*," which shows that the station of divine proximity and presence is necessarily accompanied by security, and can never be mixed with any evil that may be feared. This interpretation is confirmed by an alternative expression that is mentioned instead of this in the same story in Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ: *Surely you are of those who are secure* (28:31). Overall, the meaning is: Do not fear anything because you are a messenger, and the messengers—that is, those who are in My presence—are secure. There is no fear at that station of divine proximity."

Moses fled the staff when it took on that scary form and started moving rapidly like a swift snake. This is a natural reaction by the instinct which God has created in humans; we naturally flee when we confront a danger where our only means of protection is to escape. His only weapon was his staff, which was the very cause of his fear. Furthermore, God had neither commanded him to stay, nor forbidden him from fleeing. He had only said, "*And cast down your staff*" (27:10), which he obeyed. Fleeing from great dangers—when there is no other way of protection—does not make one blameworthy of timidity.

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1 Based on verse 20:20, the staff did turn into a *ḥayyah*, which, according to the above interpretation, is the same as *jānn* in the current verse. However, the current verse (27:10) says: *as if it were a* jānn. This means that serpent has been compared to itself, which is contradictory. The author's ingenious solution is that the staff neither became a *jānn* in every aspect, nor a *thuʿbān* in every aspect, but it had *some* properties of each. (Trans.)

… Fear not; surely the messengers shall not fear in My presence. Based on this sentence, the prophets and messengers do not fear anything, because they are ever in the presence of their Lord. However, they do not attain this honor by their own virtue. Rather, it is through God's training and discipline. In case of Moses, that night in Ṭūr was the first time that God brought him near Himself, chose him for His conversation, and blessed him with His grace and messengership. Hence, we should interpret these words of God—"*Fear not; surely you are of those who are secure*" (28:31) and "*Fear not; surely the messengers shall not fear in My presence*" (27:10)—as ways in which Moses received divine teaching and training.

It should now be clear that there is no element of blame or rebuke in "*Fear not; surely the messengers shall not fear in My presence*" (27:10), but rather it is God's way of training and nurturing Moses.

إِلاَّ مَنْ ظَلَمَ ثُمَّ بَدَّلَ حُسْناً بَعْدَ سُوءٍ فَإِنِّي غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١١﴾

(27:11) *Nor* (illā) *shall he who has been unjust* (ẓalama, from ẓulm)*, then does good instead after evil, for surely I am the Forgiving, the Merciful*

Since the previous verse said that the messengers are secure and have no fear, it implicitly suggests that others—who have committed injustice and iniquity—are not secure and should fear. So this verse makes an exception for unjust people who repent. It says that because they repent and forsake injustice—which is evil—and embrace good, they will be forgiven and shown mercy. Thus, they also have no fear. This is the most plausible interpretation for the verse; and God knows best.

Based on this interpretation, the word *illā* (lit. "except, but") shows an unconnected exception (*al-istithnāʾ al-munqaṭiʿ*).[1] Likewise, *ẓulm* (lit. "injustice, oppression, wrong, iniquity") means any sin, and "good after evil" means repentance after sinning, and doing good deeds after one has committed evil deeds. The implied meaning is: If someone is unjust due to sinning, but then changes for the better, does good instead of evil, and repents after disobeying, then I am surely Forgiving and Merciful. I will

1 This means that what is being excepted is not a member of the original group. In other words, "*he who has been unjust*" (27:11) is not part of "*the messengers*" (27:10), but what is said in this verse is a new sentence independent from the previous verse. (Trans.)

forgive his injustice, and will have mercy on him. Thus that person shall have no fear after that.

وَ أَدْخِلْ يَدَكَ فِي جَيْبِكَ تَخْرُجْ بَيْضاءَ مِنْ غَيْرِ سُوءٍ فِي تِسْعِ آياتٍ إِلى فِرْعَوْنَ وَ قَوْمِهِ إِنَّهُمْ كانُوا قَوْماً فاسِقِينَ ﴿١٢﴾

(27:12) ***And put your hand to your chest. It shall come forth white without evil, among nine signs to Pharaoh and his people. Surely they are a transgressing people.***

"Evil" here has been interpreted as leprosy (*baraṣ*), which we discussed before.[1] We can deduce two points from the theme and context of these verses: (1) "*Among nine signs to Pharaoh and his people*" describes the condition (*ḥāl*) of the two signs. That is: "I am giving you these two signs—the staff and the hand—*while* they are two of nine signs." (2) These two were among the nine signs that we discussed in detail in the exposition of the verse: *And certainly We gave Moses nine clear signs* (17:101).[2] The rest of the verse is clear.

فَلَمَّا جاءَتْهُمْ آياتُنا مُبْصِرَةً قالُوا هذا سِحْرٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿١٣﴾

(27:13) ***So when Our clear*** **(mubṣirah)** ***signs came to them, they said: This*** **(hādhā)** ***is clear enchantment.***

Mubṣirah means "clear, evident." Their claim—"*this is clear enchantment*"—shows their disparagement and disregard of the signs, because they referred to all of the signs simply as *hādhā* (lit. "this"), in singular form. They did not even care to mention how many signs there were. They only referred to them vaguely as some matter [of enchantment], without any further detail.

وَ جَحَدُوا بِها وَ اسْتَيْقَنَتْها أَنْفُسُهُمْ ظُلْماً وَ عُلُوًّا فَانْظُرْ كَيْفَ كانَ عاقِبَةُ الْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

(27:14) ***And they denied*** **(jaḥadū)** ***them unjustly and proudly***

1 This was discussed under verse 20:22. See volume 27, p. 201 of the English translation. (Trans.)

2 See volume 25, pp. 297-298 of the English translation. (Trans.)

while their souls had been convinced of them **(istayqanathā, from istīqān)*****; consider, then, how was the end of the mischief-makers.***

Al-Rāghib says, "*Jaḥd* is to deny something that one knows in his heart to be true, or to affirm something that one knows in his heart to be false." *Istīqān* and *īqān* both mean the same thing (to be sure, certain and convinced).

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Verses 15-44

These verses present some of the stories of David and Solomon, including some wonders about the kingdom that God gave Solomon.

وَ لَقَدْ آتَيْنا داوُدَ وَ سُلَيْمانَ عِلْماً وَ قالا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي فَضَّلَنا عَلى كَثِيرٍ مِنْ عِبادِهِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

(27:15) ***And certainly We gave knowledge to David and Solomon, and they both said: Praise be to Allah, Who has preferred us over many of His believing servants.***

The word *ʿilman* (knowledge) is in the indefinite form, which shows significance in this case.[1] Another verse referring to David's knowledge is: *And We gave him wisdom and a clear judgment* (38:20). Another verse referring to Solomon's knowledge is: *So We made Solomon understand it; and to each one We gave wisdom and knowledge* (21:79). Note that the subsequent part of this verse [21:79] refers to both of them.[2]

… and they both said: Praise be to Allah, Who has preferred us over many of His believing servants: There are two possible interpretations for "preference" in this verse: (1) It means being preferred over others by knowledge in particular, as suggested by the context of the verse. (2) It means unconditional preference in general, which would include all of God's exclusive blessings upon them. Some of these blessings upon David were: making the mountains and birds subservient to him; making iron soft for him; and making him a king. Some of these blessings upon Solomon were: making the jinn, the animals, the birds and the wind subservient to him; teaching him the language of birds; and making him a king kingdom. The first interpretation could be confirmed by the theme of the verse [where there is mention of knowledge prior to this]. The second interpretation could be confirmed by the unqualified use of the word "preference" in the verse.

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1 It means: "We gave them such knowledge!" (Trans.)

2 See volume 28, pp. 103ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

And they both said: Praise be to Allah…: Here they acknowledge God's preference. The beginning of the chapter involved an implied promise that God will soon bless the believers with what will delight them. Therefore, this sentence serves as evidence for that. We shall see similar acknowledgements by Solomon which serve the same purpose later on in the chapter.

وَ وَرِثَ سُلَيْمانُ داوُدَ وَ قالَ يا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ عُلِّمْنا مَنْطِقَ الطَّيْرِ وَ أُوتِينا مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ إِنَّ هذا لَهُوَ الْفَضْلُ الْمُبِينُ ﴿١٦﴾

(27:16) ***And Solomon inherited from David, and he said: O people! We have been taught the language of birds, and we have been given all things; most surely this is manifest grace.***

That is, Solomon inherited David's wealth and kingdom. According to some exegetes, what is meant is that Solomon inherited David's prophethood and knowledge. The problem with this view is that prophethood cannot be inherited because it is not transferable. Knowledge also cannot be inherited, although it can be transferred, in a sense. Even so, transfer of knowledge is only applicable in the case of acquired mental knowledge. The knowledge that is exclusively found among the prophets and messengers is of a different type. Their knowledge is not a result of mental activity, but it comes from God's grace and endowment. Hence, non-prophets can inherit knowledge from the prophets [through their teaching and preaching], but a prophet does not inherit his knowledge from another prophet or a non-prophet.

… and he said: O people* (al-nās)*! We have been taught the language* (manṭiq) *of birds and we have been given all things; most surely this is manifest grace: Here, Solomon appears to be boasting about himself and his father, but he is in fact speaking of God's bounties, as per His command: *And as for the favor of your Lord, do announce (it)* (93:11). Some exegetes have insisted that the plural pronouns in "*We have been taught*" and "*We have been given*" refer to Solomon alone, not to him and his father. Such use of plural is common in the language of kings and great figures; it is a way of including their servants and associates who help them in governing their kingdom. However, this view is not fully supported by the theme and thread of speech in the last verse.

The meaning of *nās* (people, humankind) here is clear: It refers to all people, not any particular group. Some exegetes have said that *nās*, in

this verse, means "prominent ruling figures or scholars." However, this view is not plausible.

The word *manṭiq* is synonymous with *nuṭq* (language, speech), which, as we know, refers to simple or compound sounds that have been set by convention to indicate a certain meaning that is intended by a speaker. The intended meaning is called *kalām* (speech). According to al-Rāghib, the word *manṭiq* is only used for human beings. The Noble Qur'an, however, uses *manṭiq* with a more comprehensive meaning, which is the expression and indication of *any* intended meaning by *anything*. God says: *And they shall say to their skins: Why have you borne witness against us? They shall say: Allah Who makes everything speak has made us speak* (41:21). There are two possible explanations for this usage: (1) It is based on analyzing and dissecting the meaning of a term that is exclusively used for physical and material applications, and then applying it to immaterial and non-physical cases. The Qur'an has used this method for most concepts that have exclusively physical and material applications, such as seeing (*ruʾyah*), perception (*naẓar*), hearing, tablet, pen, throne, and seat (*kursī*). (2) It is based on the idea that the term [*manṭiq*] has a general and comprehensive meaning to being with. If it is exclusively used for human beings, it is only due to the frequency of this usage.

Either way, the language of birds is what certain birds use to convey their intended meaning. Every species of bird makes simple sounds under specific conditions and on specific occasions for various reasons. For example, they have sounds for mating, attacking, defending, fear, pleading, and begging. The same is seen in other animals. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the language of birds in this verse is much subtler and more comprehensive than that. There are a few reasons for this:

(1) The context of the verse is about an exclusive favor that God bestowed upon David and Solomon by His grace. It was something beyond the access of ordinary people. This is while the abovementioned language of birds is accessible to everyone, and everyone can understand it.

(2) What God narrates in the following verses about the conversation of Solomon with the hoopoe involves a variety of sublime teachings that cannot be conveyed by the few types of sounds that is typically heard from a hoopoe. In this chapter, the hoopoe talks about God, His magnificent Throne, and His unity, power, knowledge and Lordship. He also talks about Satan and how he adorns the actions of people in their sights,

as well as guidance, misguidance, and other related concepts. He further speaks of the kingdom [of Sheba], its queen, her throne, her people, and their prostration to the sun. Then Solomon commands him to take his letter, cast it upon them, and then see how they will respond. It is clear for anyone who is well-versed in these meanings and linguistics that these are deep and expansive teachings whose comprehension hinges on knowing thousands and thousands of concepts. How could a very few and simple sounds suffice to convey all these things in detail?

(3) There is no evidence that every sound or vibration that an animal emits can be detected and distinguished by our senses. This is confirmed by what is narrated in the following verses from an ant, while our hearing cannot detect an ant's sound for sure. It is also confirmed by what contemporary scientists have discovered—that people can only hear a certain range of frequencies (roughly 16 to 32,000 Hz).[1] Our ears are incapable of hearing sounds with higher or lower frequencies, but perhaps other animals—or some of them—are able to hear them. Zoologists have discovered wonders and subtleties about the understanding and comprehension of a variety of animals—such as horses, dogs, monkeys, bears, bees, ants, and others—that have not been discovered in most human beings.

Based on the above, the theme and context of the verses show that birds have a special language which God taught to Solomon. This invalidates the view, suggested by some exegetes, that "it was Solomon's miracle to make the birds speak; otherwise, they do not have their own language."

… and we have been given all things…: That is, we have been given a share of everything. "All things" would include anything that can be imagined to exist, because "thing" (*shayʾ*) is one of the most comprehensive concepts, which is further emphasized by "all." However, this sentence is said in a context of talking about God's favors and blessings, and not even all favors and blessings, but specifically blessings that can be given to humans for their enjoyment. This context qualifies the meaning of "all things." The implied meaning is: God has given us a fair share of every blessing that a person can be given and can benefit from, such as knowledge, prophethood, kingdom, judgment and other material and spiritual blessings.

… most surely this is manifest grace: This is a way of showing gratitude

1 32 kHz is an overestimation. The range is commonly given as 20 to 20,000 Hz. (Trans.)

and emphasizing that what he said is a description of God's favors, not an expression of vainglory, pride or conceit. This is apparent because he ascribes all of these favors to God by saying: *We have been taught* and *We have been given*. Some exegetes hold that, in these sentences, the speaker is God, not Solomon. However, this would be against the flow of the verse.

وَ حُشِرَ لِسُلَيْمانَ جُنُودُهُ مِنَ الْجِنِّ وَ الْإِنْسِ وَ الطَّيْرِ فَهُمْ يُوزَعُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

(27:17) ***And his hosts of the jinn and the men and the birds were gathered*** **(ḥushira, from ḥashr)** ***to him, and they were formed into groups*** **(yūzaʿūna, from wazʿ).**

Ḥashr means "to gather and muster the people and send them to do some task by force." *Wazʿ* means "to prevent and stop." *Wazʿ* has also been interpreted as "detaining" and "keeping in custody." The verse has been interpreted as follows: Solomon's hosts of jinn, men, and birds were gathered before him, and they were prevented from dispersing or intermingling. Each group was kept separate and restrained in its place.

It can be deduced from this verse that Solomon had hosts of jinn and birds, which used to travel with him, just like his host of men. Referring to them as "hosts" that were "gathered," as well as the context of the following verses, suggests that these hosts were specific subgroups of jinn, men and birds, whether the particle *min* (lit. "of") is partitive or descriptive.

The author of *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* [that is, al-Rāzī] has made some strange inferences from these verses, such as: (1) All jinn, men and birds were Solomon's hosts. (2) Solomon ruled over the entire earth. (3) God made the birds intelligent and responsible at his time, but then He reverted them to their previous condition. He has made a similar claim about the ant that spoke. In his exposition of the verse, he says:

It means that God made each of these types [of things] one of his hosts, which means that they would act only according to his will. Such submission only makes sense in beings that have some share of intellect (*ʿaql*) which makes them subject to duty and responsibility. They should have had at least as much intelligence and comprehension as a child who is very close to the age of religious accountability. That is why we said that God made the birds at his time among intelligent beings. This, however, is not the case at our time, albeit there are some animals in whom God has inspired certain subtleties that are specifically related to their needs,

or which bear special benefits for the people, such as the honeybee and other beings.

The weak points in the above interpretation are needless of exposition.

The jinn have been mentioned before the men and birds because the subservience of the jinn is the strangest. Then men are mentioned before birds because making men subservient to someone is also strange, not to mention that jinn and men are complementary.

حَتَّى إِذا أَتَوْا عَلى وادِ النَّمْلِ قالَتْ نَمْلَةٌ يا أَيُّهَا النَّمْلُ ادْخُلُوا مَساكِنَكُمْ لا يَحْطِمَنَّكُمْ سُلَيْمانُ وَ جُنُودُهُ وَ هُمْ لا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

(27:18) ***Until they came upon the Valley of the Ants, an ant said: O ants! Enter your houses, (that) Solomon and his hosts may not crush you*** **(yaḥṭimannakum, from ḥaṭm)** ***while they do not know.***

The word "until" (*ḥattā*) shows the end of what is understood from the last verse. *Ḥaṭm* is synonymous with *kasr* (to break, to crush). The plural pronoun "they" refers to Solomon and his hosts. The verse uses the preposition *ʿalā* (over) because their advent was from above. It has been said that the Valley of the Ants was in Syria. Others have said it was in the land of Ṭāʾif. Others have said at the furthest end of Yemen. The ant's statement shows that Solomon and his hosts were traveling on the land.

The implied meaning is: Solomon and his hosts travelled until they came upon the Valley of the Ants. Thereupon, an ant said to the other ants: "O ants! Enter your houses, lest Solomon and his hosts break you; that is, lest they step on you, while they are unaware."

فَتَبَسَّمَ ضاحِكاً مِنْ قَوْلِها وَ قالَ رَبِّ أَوْزِعْنِي أَنْ أَشْكُرَ نِعْمَتَكَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيَّ وَ عَلى والِدَيَّ وَ أَنْ أَعْمَلَ صالِحاً تَرْضاهُ وَ أَدْخِلْنِي بِرَحْمَتِكَ فِي عِبادِكَ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿١٩﴾

(27:19) ***So he smiled*** **(fa-tabassama)***,* ***laughing*** **(ḍāḥikan, from ḍiḥk)** ***at its words, and said: My Lord! Inspire me that I should be grateful for Thy favor which Thou hast bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I should act righteously such as Thou art pleased with, and admit me, by Thy mercy, among Thy righteous servants.***

It is said that *tabassum* is a stage before laughing [that is, smiling]. Therefore, mentioning laughter (*ḍiḥk*) afterwards is a way of saying that his smile was very close to laughter.

Solomon understanding the ant's speech does not contract what he said earlier—"*We have been taught the language of birds*" (27:16)— because the former statement does not exclude the possibility of understanding what other animals say. It could be that he also knew the language of other animals—or some of them—such as ants.

However, a group of exegetes have assumed that "*We have been taught the language of birds*" (27:16) negates understanding anything beyond that. Thus, with difficulty, they have tried to justify his understanding of the ant's speech. Some have said that this only happened once. Some have said that the ant had wings, and therefore was classified as a "bird."[1] Some have said that the ant speaking was one of Solomon's miracles. Some have said that he did not hear any sound from it, but he understood what was in the ant's heart through inspiration from God.

The context of the verses is sufficient to dismiss these speculations. The fact of the matter should be clear given what we said above concerning what is meant by the language of animals in these verses.[2]

… and said: My Lord! Inspire me **(awziʿnī, from īzāʿ)** ***that I should be grateful for Thy favor which Thou hast bestowed on me and on my parents,*** *…: Īzāʿ* means *ilhām* (to inspire).[3] Solomon smiled with delight because of God's blessings upon him. He was pleased with the lofty positions that God had granted him, including prophethood, kingdom, knowing

1 One should indeed "smile, laughing at this speech." In response to such a closed mindset in understanding the Qur'an, one can only say, "So much I yearn for proper understanding." Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, vol. 3, line 2100. (Trans.)

2 As the author explained, "language of animals" in these verses does not refer to the apparent sounds that they emit, but to a special and supernatural level of comprehension that they have. The context of the verses also point to God's special blessings upon Solomon in terms of knowledge and sovereignty. (Trans.)

3 This is from the same root as *yūzaʿūna* in verse 27:17 above, and verse 27:83 below, where it is interpreted as "stop" and "hold back." The same word is used in verse 41:19, where it has the same meaning. It seems that the common element in *īzāʿ* is "to make someone stand in a place or position." Here it would mean: "My Lord, set me up to thank you; make me live up to being grateful…." (Trans.)

the language of animals, and having hosts of jinn, men and birds. Thus he asked God to evoke in him gratefulness for His bounties, and actions that would please Him.

In asking for gratefulness, he specifies God's favors upon himself and upon his parents. This is because the blessings upon his parents were in a way blessings upon himself, for his existence was through them. God blessed his father David with prophethood, kingdom, wisdom, decisive judgment and other favors; and He blessed his mother by making her the wife of the Prophet David, giving her Prophet Solomon as a son. Thus God made her part of the household of prophethood. This supplication shows that Solomon's mother was among those who followed the straight path.[1] She was one of those whom God has blessed, who are one of the four groups mentioned in the verse: *Those upon whom Allah has bestowed favors, of the prophets and the truthful and the martyrs and the righteous* (4:69).

… and that I should act righteously such as Thou art pleased with…: The conjunction "and" joins this sentence to: *that I should be grateful for Thy favor*. It means: "Inspire me to do righteously…." This request is much loftier and nobler than asking for *tawfiq* (facilitation, ability, reconciling) to do good deeds, because facilitation pertains to the availability of *external* means in a way that matches one's felicity, while the inspiration that he asked for is an *inner* drive toward felicity and salvation. Thus, it is likely that he intended was to be given the same kind of *waḥy* (revelation, inspiration) with which God had honored Abraham and his family. God describes this *waḥy* where He says: *And We revealed to them the doing of good* (21:73). Essentially, this kind of *waḥy* refers to being aided by the Holy Spirit, as we discussed in our exposition of verse 21:73.[2]

… and admit me, by Thy mercy, among Thy righteous servants: "Righteousness" here is not qualified by "deeds" [that is, it does not describe actions]; therefore it refers to the inherent goodness and the

1 This exonerates her and sets her clear of what is said in the Torah. It is said there that she was Uriah's wife, but David slept with her, then he made plans to have Uriah killed in a battle. Then David brought her among his wives, and she gave birth to Solomon for him. (Author)

What is meant by "Torah" here is the Old Testament. See 2 Samuel 11-12. (Trans.)

2 See volume 28, pp. 93ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

essential righteousness of one's soul. It is what qualifies a person to receive every form of divine honor and grace. Evidently the righteousness of one's essence is a higher stage than righteousness of actions. Hence, Solomon's requests are ordered from lowest to highest: *that I should act righteously such as Thou art pleased with, and admit me, by Thy mercy, among Thy righteous servants* (27:19). While the righteousness of deeds is attributable to his action and volition in a way, the righteousness of his essence is not. That is why he asked God to grant him righteousness of essence, but he did not ask God to grant him righteousness of deeds; rather he asked Him to inspire him to *do* righteous deeds.

"Admit me among them" means "make me one of them." Solomon did not directly ask for "essential righteousness," but he asked to be made one of God's righteous servants. By this expression he asked for the blessings that God exclusively bestows upon these servants, the choicest of which is the lofty station of servitude (*ʿubūdiyyah*). Indeed he was granted this, as God describes him: *How excellent a servant! Surely he was frequent in returning (to Allah)* (38:30).

وَ تَفَقَّدَ الطَّيْرَ فَقالَ ما لِيَ لا أَرَى الْهُدْهُدَ أَمْ كانَ مِنَ الْغائِبِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

(27:20) *And he reviewed* (tafaqqada) *the birds, then said: How is it I see not the hoopoe or is it that he is of the absentees?*

Al-Rāghib says:

> *Tafaqqud* means *taʿahhud* (to inquire, to follow up), except that *tafaqqud* is paying attention to the loss or lack (*fiqdān, fuqdān*) of something, while *taʿahhud* is paying attention to a previous tie or situation (*ʿahd*). God says: *And he reviewed* (tafaqqada) *the birds*.

The first part of Solomon's question [that is, "*How is it I see not the hoopoe*"] shows his surprise with himself for not being able to see the hoopoe among the birds. It is as if it was not right to raise a doubt about the bird's absence from his convoy, or about its failure to obey him.[1] Then he asked about the hoopoe's absence as a second possibility. The implied meaning is: Why do I not see hoopoe among the birds that accompany my convoy? Or is it that the hoopoe is one of those who are absent?

1 In other words, by questioning his own awareness, Solomon turns the blame to himself instead of doubting the hoopoe's obedience. (Trans.)

لَأُعَذِّبَنَّهُ عَذاباً شَدِيداً أَوْ لَأَذْبَحَنَّهُ أَوْ لَيَأْتِيَنِّي بِسُلْطانٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٢١﴾

(27:21) ***I will most certainly punish him*** **(la-uʿadhdhibannahu)** ***with a severe punishment, or slaughter him*** **(la-adhbaḥannahu),** ***or he shall bring to me*** **(la-yaʾtiyannī)** ***a clear plea*** **(bi-sulṭān mubīn).**

The letter *lām* at the beginning of the three verbs indicates that a vow being sworn.[1] *Sulṭān mubīn* means "a clear proof." Here, Solomon mentions three possible judgments for the hoopoe: severe punishment, slaughter, or bringing a clear justification. The first two invoke the bird's damnation, while the last one promises his salvation.

فَمَكَثَ غَيْرَ بَعِيدٍ فَقالَ أَحَطْتُ بِما لَمْ تُحِطْ بِهِ وَ جِئْتُكَ مِنْ سَبَإٍ بِنَبَإٍ يَقِينٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

(27:22) ***And he tarried not long, then said: I have comprehended*** **(aḥaṭtu, from iḥāṭah)** ***that which you have not comprehended and I have brought you certain news*** **(bi-nabaʾ yaqīn)** ***from Sheba.***

There are two possibilities for the pronoun "he" in "*he tarried*": (1) It refers to Solomon, following the previous verses. (2) It refers to the hoopoe, in accordance with what comes next in the verse.[2]

Here, *iḥāṭah* (lit. "to encompass, to surround") means "having full knowledge of something." "*And I have brought you*" is added as an explanation and exposition of "*I have comprehended*." Sheba (Sabaʾ) was the capital city of Yemen at the time. *Nabaʾ* means "important news." *Yaqīn* means "doubtless".

The verse involves some omission and concision. The implied meaning can be elaborated as follows: Solomon—or the hoopoe—waited for

1 It is intended for emphasis and means "most certainly, surely, indeed." (Trans.)

2 The author, following the Qur'an, has used the singular masculine pronoun "he" for the hoopoe. This is a linguistic usage in Arabic, but it is especially meaningful in these verses because the hoopoe is an intelligent being. However, I have used the pronoun "it" for the hoopoe as it is normally used for birds in English, in order to avoid confusion with pronouns referring to Solomon. (Trans.)

a short while, then the hoopoe came and Solomon asked him about its absence and reproached it for being late. The hoopoe replied: "I have come to know what you do not know, and I have brought you important news from Sheba; news in which there is no doubt."

According to some exegetes, the hoopoe began by saying, "*I have comprehended that which you have not comprehended*" in order to attract Solomon's attention and calm his impulse.

إِنِّي وَجَدْتُ امْرَأَةً تَمْلِكُهُمْ وَ أُوتِيَتْ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَ لَها عَرْشٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

(27:23) ***Surely I found a woman ruling over them, and she has been given of every thing, and she has a mighty throne.***

The pronoun "them" refers to the people of Sheba and its environs. "*She has been given of every thing*" describes her vast and great kingdom. This context shows that "every thing" here means everything pertaining to a great empire, such as prudence, authority, power, vast lands, treasures, mighty armies and obedient citizens. Out of all these, the hoopoe named her mighty throne specifically.

وَجَدْتُها وَ قَوْمَها يَسْجُدُونَ لِلشَّمْسِ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَ زَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطانُ أَعْمالَهُمْ فَصَدَّهُمْ عَنِ السَّبِيلِ فَهُمْ لا يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

(27:24) ***I found her and her people adoring the sun instead of Allah, and Satan has made their deeds fair-seeming to them and thus turned them from the way, so they do not go aright.***

It means: They are a group of idolaters who worship the sun.

… and Satan has made their deeds fair-seeming to them…: This sentence is added as an explanation of the first part of the verse. It also sets the ground for what is said next. "Their deeds" refer to their acts of worship to other gods besides Allah, such as prostration and other means of winning favor with their gods.

… and thus turned them from the way…: "The way" is God's way, which is to worship Him alone. Satan turned them away from God's way by decorating their deeds in their eyes. "The way" (*al-sabīl*) is mentioned without any qualification, as opposed to saying "the way of God". This alludes to the fact that His way is the *only* way that intrinsically serves as a path for humankind according to their primary nature and disposition

(*fiṭrah*). Rather, it is the only way for all things in terms of creation as a whole.

… so they do not go aright: The letter *fāʾ* (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of this sentence shows that this sentence is a consequence and conclusion of the previous statement. This only makes sense, because once one is turned away [from the only way], "going aright" is no longer applicable. The reader should reflect on this.

أَلاَّ يَسْجُدُوا لِلَّهِ الَّذِى يُخْرِجُ الْخَبْءَ فِى السَّماواتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ وَ يَعْلَمُ ما تُخْفُونَ وَ ما تُعْلِنُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

(27:25) ***That they do not*** **(allā)** ***make obeisance to Allah, Who brings forth what is hidden*** **(al-khabʾ)** ***in the heavens and the earth and knows what you hide and what you make manifest.***

The common recitation of the first word is *allā*, which is composed of *an lā* (meaning, "that they do not"). It serves as an exposition of "their deeds" in the previous verse. The implied meaning is: "Satan made it fair-seeming to them to not make obeisance to God." Some exegetes have suggested that the meaning involves an omitted letter *lām* at the beginning that shows purpose (called *lām al-taʿlīl*). The implied meaning would be: "Satan made their going astray fair-seeming to them so that (*li-allā*) they would not make obeisance to God."

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> *Al-khabʾ* means *al-makhbūʾ*, which is "something that has been encompassed by something else, such that it cannot be perceived." *Khabʾ* is a verbal noun that serves as an adjective [in this verse]. It is used as *khabaʾtuhu, akhbaʾuhu, khabʾan*. It is used when God gives existence to something, because things are initially "hidden" in non-existence, then God He brings them forth to existence.

Therefore, what is said here—"*Who brings forth what is hidden in the heavens and the earth*"—is a metaphorical expression. It is as if things are hidden and covered under layers of non-existence, then God brings them out into existence one after another. Referring to the existentiation of things after their non-existence as "bringing forth the hidden" is very close to using the word *fiṭr* for God's creation of the heavens and the earth. *Fiṭr* means to split. It is as if He splits non-existence and brings out things

from it. Thus He is called *al-Fāṭir*.[1]

It is also possible to interpret this sentence literally, not metaphorically, but that would need an explanation that is beyond the scope of the current work.[2] Some exegetes have said that *khabʾ* means "the unseen" (*ghayb*), and "bringing it forth" means "knowing about it." The weakness of this interpretation should be clear.[3]

… and knows what you hide **(tukhfūna)** ***and what you make manifest*** **(tuʿlinūna)***:* Since the verbs *tukhfūna* and *tuʿlinūna* start with the letter *tāʾ*, they are in the second person. That is: "He knows *your* secrets and what *you* manifest." However, in most of the [seven] recitations, the verbs are recorded as *yukhfūna* and *yuʿlinūna*, beginning with the letter *yāʾ*, which makes them third person. This is preferable in terms of meaning.[4]

The gist of the verse's argument is: They prostrate to the sun instead of God as a sign of reverence. However, their attraction to the sun is only because of the benefits that God has placed in it for the globe. This is how God has set up the universe and directs its affairs. On the other hand, God is the One Who has brought forth all things from non-existence to existence, from the unseen to the manifest, and has set in place this ordered system of the universe—part of which is the creation and direction of the sun. Hence, it is more befitting to revere God; He is worthier of prostration [than the sun or any other being]. Furthermore, it does not make sense to worship something that cannot realize it is being worshiped, such as the sun. On the other hand, God knows what they hide and what they disclose. Thus, God alone is to be prostrated to and revered, not anything or anyone else.

The above explanation clarifies how this verse connects to the next

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1 See verses 6:14, 6:79, 11:51, 12:101, 14:10, 17:51, 20:72, 21:56, 30:30, 35:1, 36:22, 39:47, 42:11 and 43:27. (Trans.)

2 This apparently refers to the theory of emanation (*ifāḍah*) and manifestation (*tajallī*) in Islamic philosophy and theoretical mysticism. In short, there is no transition between existence and non-existence in the universe, but the entire creation is only a matter of appearance and hiddenness. (Trans.)

3 The problem is that this interpretation turns the meaning away from the apparent meaning of the terms *khabʾ* and *ikhrāj* without any evidence to support it. (Trans.)

4 The meaning would be: "He knows what *they* hide and what *they* make manifest." (Trans.)

verse: *Allah, there is no god but He…* (27:26).

اللَّهُ لا إِلهَ إِلاَّ هُوَ رَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٢٦﴾

(27:26) ***Allah, there is no god but He: He is the Lord of the Mighty Throne.***

The speaker, in this verse, is still the hoopoe. Here it explicitly states the conclusion that was implicit in its previous explanation. It proclaims the truth against their false belief by stating two points in sequence: (1) First, it said, "*there is no god but He*," indicating monotheism in worship. (2) Then it added, "*the Lord of the Mighty Throne*," indicating that God is the One Who directs all affairs. The "throne" of a king refers to the king's central position of controlling all affairs and issuing rules for his entire kingdom.

There is a further parallel between the hoopoe's description of God as "*the Lord of the Mighty Throne*" and its description of the Queen of Sheba as "*and she has a mighty throne*" (27:23). Perhaps the hoopoe's description [about the Queen's throne being "mighty"] was the cause—or one of the catalysts—that induced Solomon to ask for her throne to be brought to him in order to humble every glory before the magnificence of his Lord.

قالَ سَنَنْظُرُ أَ صَدَقْتَ أَمْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الْكاذِبِينَ ﴿٢٧﴾

(27:27) ***He said: We will see whether you have told the truth or whether you are of the liars.***

The pronoun "he" refers to Solomon. He deferred judgment about the hoopoe to the future. Solomon did not confirm the hoopoe's claim because there was no evidence for it, nor did he deny it because there was no reason to deny it. Instead, he told the hoopoe that he shall test and examine what it said.

اذْهَبْ بِكِتابِي هذا فَأَلْقِهْ إِلَيْهِمْ ثُمَّ تَوَلَّ عَنْهُمْ فَانْظُرْ ما ذا يَرْجِعُونَ﴿٢٨﴾

(27:28) ***Take this letter of mine and cast it*** (fa-alqih) ***unto them, then turn away from them and see what (answer) they return.***

This is an account of what Solomon told the hoopoe. It implies that Solomon wrote a letter and then gave these instructions to the hoopoe:

Take this letter of mine and cast it unto them: referring to the Queen

of Sheba and her commanders.

… then turn away from them…: That is, stay at a distance from them where you can observe them.

… and see what (answer) they return: That is, observe what they tell each other when they discuss the letter.

The letter *hāʾ* at the end of *fa-alqih* is paused at in all recitations, whether the recitation is continued or stopped at it. It is called *hāʾ al-sakt* (lit. "the *hāʾ* of pause"). Some exegetes have said that Solomon's instructions—"*then turn away from them and see what (answer) they return*"—are not mentioned in sequence in the verse. What is really meant is: "See what answer they provide, then return from them." However, the implausibility of this view should be clear.

قالَتْ يا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ إِنِّي أُلْقِيَ إِلَيَّ كِتابٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿٢٩﴾ إِنَّهُ مِنْ سُلَيْمانَ وَ إِنَّهُ بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿٣٠﴾

(27:29-30) ***She said: O chief! Surely an honorable letter has been delivered to me. It is from Solomon, and it is in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.***

These verses have an implied omission. The implied meaning is: So the hoopoe received the letter, took it to the Queen of Sheba, and cast it down to her once he arrived. She picked it up, read it, and then told the chiefs and elites among her people, "*O chiefs…*."

She said: O chiefs! Surely an honorable letter has been delivered to me: This verse tells us how she informed her chief commanders about the letter, how the letter reached her, and the content of the letter. She glorified the letter by describing it as *karīm* (honorable, noble, valuable).

It is from Solomon, and it is in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful: Apparently, this verse serves to explain and justify why the letter was honorable. She called it honorable because: (1) *It is from Solomon*; and (2) *it is in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful*. She was well aware of Solomon's dominion and the great kingdom and wonderful majesty that he was given, as God narrates from her later: *And we were given the knowledge before it, and we were submissive* (27:42).

… and it is in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful: All idolaters, including sun-worshipers, believed in God as the Lord of the lords, although they did not worship Him. Sun-worshipers were a branch

of the Sabeans, who glorified God and His attributes, but they interpreted God's attributes as negative attributes that point to His purity from imperfections. For instance, they interpreted God's knowledge, power, life and mercy as the lack of ignorance, weakness, death and cruelty in Him.

Given these beliefs, it only makes sense that she found the letter to be honorable, because: *it is in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.* Therefore, this sentence was part of her explanation for why the letter was honorable, just like her previous sentence in the verse, where she says that the letter is honorable because it is from Solomon the Great. Then, she describes the actual content of the letter in the next verse: *Saying* (an)*: Exalt not yourselves against me and come to me in submission* (27:31), where the particle *an* (lit. "that") is descriptive of the letter.[1]

Here is a strange interpretation offered by a number of exegetes: What she says here—"*It is from Solomon*" (27:30)—is a new statement, not a continuation of the previous thread. She said this as an answer to an implied question, as if they had asked: "From whom is this letter? And what is in it?" She answered the first question by saying, "*It is from Solomon*," which means that the next part of the verse (*and it is in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful*) answers the second implied question, where she starts describing the text of the letter. This means that the letter's content is: *In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.* [An] *exalt not yourselves against me and come to me in submission*.

The problem with the above interpretation is that the particle *an* at the beginning of the next verse [27:31] would be redundant and pointless. To explain this, some exegetes have said that the particle serves to turn the verb that follows it into an infinitive (called *an maṣdariyyah*), and the word *lā* (lit. "not") does not show a prohibition, but a negation.[2] This, however,

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1 The author's point here is that the two instances of *innahu* (lit. "it is") in this verse have the same meaning and serve the same purpose. The second *innahu* does not mean "it says"; it does not indicate that she is now reading the letter. Instead, in the entire verse she is explaining why the letter is honorable. Then she describes its content in the following verse. Given this interpretation, it could be that the letter *bāʾ* in *bism Allāh* is part of the queen's description of how the letter begins, not part of the actual text of the letter. (Trans.)

2 Based on this meaning, the letter is saying: "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. Your lack of exaltation against me [is desired], and come to me in submission." As the author explains below, this meaning is

is an implausible possibility, as we shall discuss below.

Here are some suggested explanations by the exegetes for why the letter was honorable:

It was honorable because it was sealed. There is a narration which says, "To honor a letter is to seal it." In fact, some exegetes have claimed that a letter's honor actually *means* sealing it, such that when one seals a letter he says, "I have honored the letter; now it is honorable."

It was honorable because of its good hand-writing and elegant expression.

It was honorable because it reached her in an abnormal way.

She called it honorable because she thought that it was a heavenly letter, since it was cast upon her by a bird.

And thus goes the list of such explanations. The reader will agree that these are unsatisfying speculations. Apparently the root cause of their error is in how they have interpreted the word *innahu* (lit. "it is") in: *It is* (innahu) *in the name of Allah* (27:30). They have interpreted *innahu* as marking the very text of the letter, whereby she quotes the letter's content verbatim, until "…*in submission*" (27:31). This is contrary to what we said above—that the entire verse 27:30 (*It is from Solomon, and it is in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful*) is meant to explain and justify the honorability of the letter. What shows the implausibility of their interpretation is that, in its overt meaning, the particle *an* (that, saying) in the next verse—*That* (an)*: exalt not yourselves against me* (27:31)—shows that she is describing the *gist* of the letter and *paraphrasing* its message. The particle *an* does not suggest direct quotation.

Thus, the two verses together are essentially saying: "This letter begins with the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful; and its purport is that he [Solomon] prohibits us from being arrogant before him, and commands us to submit to him." This interpretation is free from any problem or contradiction.

أَلَّا تَعْلُوا عَلَيَّ وَأْتُونِي مُسْلِمِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

(27:31) *Saying* (an)*: Exalt not yourselves against me and come to me in submission.*

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contrived. (Trans.)

As mentioned above, the particle *an* (that, saying) is *mufassirah* (descriptive, explanatory). It interprets the message of Solomon's letter.

Some exegetes have suggested that the particle is *maṣdariyyah* (that is, it turns the verb that follows it into an infinitive) and the particle *lā* (lit. "not") is negative (*nāfiyah*). So the verse is saying: "Your lack of exaltation against me." This is an implausible interpretation because of two problems: (1) It requires a subject or predicate which has been omitted from the verse, while there is no need to assume so. (2) It means that the first half of the verse is an indicative or declarative statement (*ikhbār*), while the second half—"*and come to me*"—is an imperative one (*inshāʾ*). However, it is ungrammatical to join an imperative statement to a declarative one by the conjunction "and."

… Exalt not yourselves against me…: That is, do not be haughty against me.

***… and come to me in submission* (muslimīn):** What is meant here is the literal meaning of *islām*, which is submission and obedience. This is confirmed by his first order: *Exalt not yourselves against me*. It does not mean Islam in the technical [albeit general] sense, which is to believe in God. If the technical meaning of *īmān* (belief, faith) were intended here, then it would have been more befitting to say: "Exalt not yourselves against God." Nevertheless, coming to Solomon and being submissive to him necessitates believing in God, as can be deduced from what the hoopoe said [about their lack of obeisance to God] and the verses that follow.

Solomon was certainly a prophet, and his duty was to invite people to faith. Yet, this does not contradict his command to submit to him, because he was also a king. Moreover, his call to unconditional submission to him [as opposed to submission (*islām*) in the technical sense] necessitated that they would also believe in God, as we said above. Indeed, the Queen's submission to Solomon led to her submission to God, as God narrates from her: *I submit with Solomon to Allah, the Lord of the worlds* (27:44).

قالَتْ يا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ أَفْتُونِي فِي أَمْرِي ما كُنْتُ قاطِعَةً أَمْراً حَتَّى تَشْهَدُونِ ﴿٣٢﴾

(27:32) ***She said: O chiefs! Advise me* (aftūnī, from iftāʾ) *respecting my affair: I never decide* (qāṭiʿah, from qaṭʿ) *an affair until you are in my presence* (tashhadūna, from shahādah).**

Iftāʾ is "to declare a fatwa" (that is, opinion). To *qaṭʿ* an affair is "to make a firm decision about it." *Shahādah* means *ḥuḍūr* (presence). In this verse, the Queen asks for the advice of her chiefs. She says: "Give me advice concerning this matter that I have come across—that is, what is mentioned in Solomon's letter. I ask for your advice because I have never ruled autocratically. Rather, I always make decisions and decrees through your consultation and in your presence."

This verse reports a second part of her speech to her chiefs. The first part was where she told them about Solomon's letter, how it reached her, and what was in it [27:29-31].

قالُوا نَحْنُ أُولُوا قُوَّةٍ وَ أُولُوا بَأْسٍ شَدِيدٍ وَ الْأَمْرُ إِلَيْكِ فَانْظُرِي ما ذا تَأْمُرِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾

(27:33) ***They said: We are possessors of strength*** **(quwwah)** ***and possessors of mighty prowess*** **(baʾs)**, ***and the command is yours, therefore see what you will command.***

Quwwah is "what strengthens people in achieving their objectives." Here it means "army" since an army is a source of strength in fighting and driving away enemies. *Baʾs* means "ferocity in action." Here it means "courage, bravery."

This verse narrates the answer of her chiefs to her, where they first tell her what would cheer her soul and calm her worry, and then they turn the decision back to herself. They told her: "Cheer up and do not be upset, for we have such strength and might that we do not fear any enemy, even if the enemy is Solomon. Furthermore, the matter is up to you; command as you wish and we will obey you."

قالَتْ إِنَّ الْمُلُوكَ إِذا دَخَلُوا قَرْيَةً أَفْسَدُوها وَ جَعَلُوا أَعِزَّةَ أَهْلِها أَذِلَّةً وَ كَذلِكَ يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

(27:34) ***She said: Surely kings, when they enter a town, ruin it*** **(afsadūhā, from ifsād)** ***and make the noblest of its people abased, and thus they (always) do.***

What is meant by *ifsād* of a town is "to destroy it, burn it and demolish its buildings." What is meant by "abasing its noblest people" is "to

disgrace and dishonor them by killing, capturing, exiling, deporting, and tyrannizing."

Based on this verse and the next, she decided to investigate Solomon's case further by sending someone to examine his state, see the signs of his prophethood and kingdom, and then bring back the news. Then she would decide between war or peace.

Apparently her chiefs were inclined to war because they began by speaking of strength and mighty prowess. That is why she began by first criticizing war implicitly, and then she explicitly expressed her decision. She said: *Surely kings, when they enter a town, ruin it.…* That is: "War is bound to end in the victory of one of the two sides, and that entails the destruction of the towns and the abasement of its noblest people. Therefore, when the enemy is mighty and powerful, it is not prudent to proceed with war as long as it is possible to make peace and conciliation, unless there is no other choice. My view, instead, is to send them a gift and then wait and see what news my messengers bring back. At that point I will make up my mind between either war or peace." Hence, what she says in the first verse (*Surely kings, when they enter a town, ruin it…*) sets the stage for what comes next (*And surely I am going to send a present to them, and shall wait to see…*).

… and make the noblest of its people abased…: She used the adjective "abased" (*adhillah*) instead of the verb "abase." Her expression is more powerful and emphatic than other alternatives such as, "they abase the noblest of its people" (*istadhallū aʿizzatahā*). What her statement shows is not only the occurrence of abasement [as an *event* which is indicated by a *verb*], but also being drenched in abasement [as one's *quality* which is indicated by an *adjective*].

… and thus they (always) do: Whereas the first part of the verse—"*they ruin it and make the noblest of its people abased*"—indicates the *initial occurrence* of ruin and abasement, this last bit describes its *continuation and persistence*. It has been said that this part of the verse is a statement by God, not the continuation of the Queen of Sheba's speech. However, this view is not plausible because the verse bears no evidence to show that God is interjecting here to confirm her statement.

وَ إِنِّي مُرْسِلَةٌ إِلَيْهِمْ بِهَدِيَّةٍ فَناظِرَةٌ بِمَ يَرْجِعُ الْمُرْسَلُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(27:35) ***And surely I am going to send a present to them, and shall***

wait to see what (answer) do the messengers bring back.

The plural pronoun "them"—in "*to them*"—refers to Solomon. This is an expression of her majestic pride and haughtiness, whereby she refrained from mentioning Solomon's name explicitly.[1] Instead, she ascribed the matter to him and those around him in plural. This expression also shows that what Solomon does is by the hands of his assistants, hosts and citizens.

… and shall wait to see what (answer) do the messengers bring back: That is: "I shall wait, and then I will act according to the circumstances." As we said above, this was the opinion of the Queen of Sheba. The plural form of "messengers" shows that the gifts were sent by a group of her people. However, this group was headed by a single individual, because Solomon addresses them in the second person singular: *irjiʿ ilayhim* ("go back to them"; 27:37).

فَلَمَّا جاءَ سُلَيْمانَ قالَ أَتُمِدُّونَنِ بِمالٍ فَما آتانِيَ اللَّهُ خَيْرٌ مِمَّا آتاكُمْ
بَلْ أَنْتُمْ بِهَدِيَّتِكُمْ تَفْرَحُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

(27:36) ***So when he came*** **(jāʾa)** ***to Solomon, he said: What? Will you help me with wealth? But what Allah has given me is better than what He has given you. Nay, you are exultant because of your present.***

The subject of *jāʾa* [that is, "it" or "he"] refers to either the gifts, or the messenger that carried the gifts.

… What? Will you help me with wealth?…: This is a rhetorical question that expresses a rebuke. It is addressed in the second person [plural] to the messenger, but also refers to those back in Sheba. This is an example of using the second person when the intended audience consists of both present and absent individuals. He rebukes them collectively without specifying the queen, just like the queen said, "*And surely I am going to send a present to them*" (27:35) without specifying Solomon, as discussed above.

Some exegetes have mentioned the possibility that his address was only directed at the messengers, and it is plural because they were a group. This, however, is not correct because the "help" was not from the messengers

1 In other words, "I'm too good to name him in person. Instead, I refer to him and his entire retinue collectively." (Trans.)

but from the *sender* of the messengers. Therefore, the rebuke cannot be addressed to them alone. "Wealth" (*mālin*) is mentioned in the indefinite form (*nakirah*) to indicate its insignificance and pettiness.

… what Allah has given me…: This refers to his kingdom and prophethood.

The implied meaning is: Do you offer me some petty wealth that is worthless to me compared to what God has given me? Indeed, the prophethood, kingdom and wealth that God has given me are better than what He has given you.

… Nay, you are exultant because of your present: After rebuking them for offering him wealth, Solomon moves on to rebuke them for taking pride in their present. That is: Your offering of wealth that is worthless to me compared to what God has given me is evil, and your exultation due to having a high regard for it and being fascinated by it is even more reprehensible.

Some have said: "Your present" means "what is presented to you" [not "what you are presenting to me"]. The meaning would be: Rather, you rejoice over gifts that are presented to you because you love abundant wealth. But I do not care about worldly wealth.

However, the unlikelihood of this interpretation is evident.[1]

ارْجِعْ إِلَيْهِمْ فَلَنَأْتِيَنَّهُمْ بِجُنُودٍ لا قِبَلَ لَهُمْ بِها وَ لَنُخْرِجَنَّهُمْ مِنْها أَذِلَّةً وَ هُمْ صاغِرُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(27:37) ***Go back to them, then we will most certainly come to them*** **(fa-la-na'tiyannahum)** ***with hosts which they shall have no power*** **(qibal)** ***to oppose there*** **(bihā)*****, and we will most certainly expel them*** **(la-nukhrijannahum)** ***therefrom in abasement, and they shall be in a state of ignominy.***

The person being spoken to is the head of the messengers, and the plural pronouns refer to the Queen of Sheba and her people. *Qibal* means *ṭāqah* (ability, power, resistance). The pronoun in *bihā* (translated as "there") refers to Sheba.[2] The letter *lām* at the beginning of

1 It is unlikely because it involves an abstraction and digression from the specific story and context of the verse. (Trans.)

2 Based on this interpretation, *bihā* indicates the place where they will lack

la-naʾtiyannahum and *la-nukhrijannahum* indicates a vow [for emphasis; that is, "most certainly"].

… and they shall be in a state of ignominy: This sentence emphasizes what was said before in the verse.

Rather than following Solomon's order—"*come to me in submission*" (27:31)—they sent a present, which was a sign of their refusal to submit. Therefore, he assumed that they were going to resist. That is why he threatened them by dispatching hosts which they would not be able to resist. For the same reason, Solomon did not talk about their submission anymore. Instead, after saying, "*Go back to them*," he immediately continued to say, "*then we will most certainly come to them*." In other words, he did not say, "Go back to them, *and if they do not come to me in submission*, then we will most certainly come to them," even though that is what his statement reduces to. He would only dispatch armies and expel them from Sheba in abasement if they continued to resist.

It is evident from the theme and context of the verse that he did not accept their present, but returned it to them.

قالَ يا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَؤُا أَيُّكُمْ يَأْتِينِي بِعَرْشِها قَبْلَ أَنْ يَأْتُونِي مُسْلِمِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾

(27:38) ***He said: O chiefs! Which of you can bring to me her throne before they come to me in submission?***

This is what Solomon said after rejecting their gift and sending back the messengers. He informed his chiefs that they would soon come to him in submission. He wanted her throne to be brought to him before the arrival of the queen and her people. This would be an evident sign of the great power that his Lord had bestowed upon him, and a clear miracle of his prophethood. This way they would submit to God, and indeed they did so, as the following verses show.

قالَ عِفْرِيتٌ مِنَ الْجِنِّ أَنَا آتِيكَ بِهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَقُومَ مِنْ مَقامِكَ وَ إِنِّي عَلَيْهِ لَقَوِيٌّ أَمِينٌ ﴿٣٩﴾

(27:39) ***An audacious*** **(ʿifrīt)** ***jinn said: I will bring it to you*** **(ātīka**

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resistance. Another possibility is to translate the pronoun as "them," referring to Solomon's hosts. The meaning would then be: "They shall have no power against our hosts." (Trans.)

bihi) ***before you rise up from your place; and most surely I am strong (and) trusty over it.***

ʿ*Ifrīt* has been defined as "a wicked and evil miscreant." *Ātī* (in *ātīka bihi*) is *ism fāʿil* (a noun for subject, active participial noun; that is, "bringer"). It could also be the present tense of the verb *ityān* (that is, "I will bring").[1] The first meaning is more compatible with the context because it shows that he is an active doer of this task.[2] Moreover, it is more appropriate given the addition of "*and most surely I am strong…*," which is also a nominal sentence (*jumlah ismiyyah*).[3] This is what the exegetes have said.

… and most surely I am strong (and) trusty over it: The pronoun "it" in "over it" (ʿ*alayhi*) refers to the act of bringing. That is: I am certainly capable of bringing her throne. Her throne is neither heavy for me to lift, nor exhausting for me to carry. I am also trustworthy and will not be disloyal to you in this matter.

قالَ الَّذِی عِنْدَهُ عِلْمٌ مِنَ الْکِتابِ أَنَا آتِیکَ بِهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ یَرْتَدَّ إِلَیْکَ طَرْفُکَ فَلَمَّا رَآهُ مُسْتَقِرًّا عِنْدَهُ قالَ هذا مِنْ فَضْلِ رَبِّی لِیَبْلُوَنِی أَ أَشْکُرُ أَمْ أَکْفُرُ وَ مَنْ شَکَرَ فَإِنَّما یَشْکُرُ لِنَفْسِهِ وَ مَنْ کَفَرَ فَإِنَّ رَبِّی غَنِیٌّ کَرِیمٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

(27:40) ***One who had a knowledge of the Book said: I will bring it to you before your glance returns to you. Then when he saw it settled beside him, he said: This is of the grace of my Lord that***

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1 The two meanings would effectively be the same. In the first case it would mean: "I am a bringer of it to you." In the second case it would mean: "I will bring it to you." (Trans.)

2 In other words, the quality is so rooted in him that it has become part of the subject and united with him, as opposed to being only an action that he does. (Trans.)

3 In other words, since the second sentence is nominal, and since it is joined by the conjunction "and" to the first sentence, it is more likely that the first sentence is also nominal. In Arabic, a nominal sentence (*jumlah ismiyyah*) is a sentence which describes a subject, not an action, and does not have a verb. (Trans.)

He may try me whether I am grateful or ungrateful; and whoever is grateful, he is grateful only for his own soul, and whoever is ungrateful, then surely my Lord is Self-sufficient, Honored.

The person mentioned in this verse was a human being because he is contrasted with a jinn. Narrations from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt say that he was Āṣif b. Barkhiyā (Asaph son of Berachiah), the vizier and successor of Solomon. Other suggested views are:

He was Khiḍr.

He was a man who possessed the Greatest Name of God: a name that if God is called by it, He will respond.

It was Gabriel.

It was Solomon himself.

However, there is no evidence supporting these views. Whoever the person was, this verse follows the previous verse without a conjunction to show the importance of this scholar who brought the queen's throne to Solomon in less than the blink of an eye.[1] The verse also shows a high regard for his knowledge by referring to it in the indefinite form (*nakirah*), as it says "*a knowledge of the Book*," meaning some knowledge that cannot be described in words.

What is meant by "the Book"—as the source of such wonderful knowledge—is either the genus of heavenly books [that is, scriptures] or the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*). The knowledge that this scholar had from that Book enabled him to achieve that objective [of transporting the throne in such a short time]. The exegetes have said that he knew God's Greatest Name that when He is called by it He answers. Some exegetes have suggested the following possibilities for this Greatest Name:

Al-Ḥayy al-Qayyūm (the Living, the Upright).

Dhū al-Jalāl wa al-Ikrām (Possessor of Majesty and Nobility).

Allāh al-Raḥman (Allah, the All-Beneficent).

Ahiyan Sharāhiyan in Hebrew.[2]

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1 Since the verse does not begin with a conjunction (like "and" or "then"), it is as if God has left the previous discourse and moved on to a new topic which is more important. This is similar to headline news which interrupts the previous program. (Trans.)

2 This formula has been altered in hadith books due to being transcribed in Arabic, and due to the transmitters' unfamiliarity with Hebrew. The original

Some have said that he made the following supplication: "O our God and the God of everything! Thou art the One God; there is no god but Thee! Bring her throne to me!" Others have mentioned other formulas.

As we explained under verse 7:180, it is impossible for the Greatest Name—which can influence and manipulate everything—to be either a verbal formula or a mental concept that is indicated by words. If there is a name with such capacity or impact, then it would be a real external name that is matched in a way by the meaning of the word. That external reality is God's name; the word that indicates it is "the name of the name" (*ism al-ism*).

In this verse, there is no indication of this name that the exegetes have mentioned. What the verse says is that he possessed a knowledge of the Book and that he said, "*I will bring it to you*." Meanwhile, we know that such action is really God's action. Therefore, we can conclude that he had such knowledge of God and such a connection with Him, that whenever he turned his attention to his Lord and asked Him for something, his request would certainly be granted. Or to be more accurate, his request would certainly be granted if God willed it.

Based on the above, it should also be clear that this knowledge was not intellectual knowledge acquirable by learning.

… I will bring it to you before your glance* (ṭarfuka) *returns* (yartadda, from radd and irtdiād) *to you…: It has been said that *ṭarf* means "look" (*laḥẓ*) or "glance" (*naẓar*). The returning of *ṭarf* is when the image of the object that is being sighted reaches the viewer and becomes an object of one's knowledge. Therefore, the meaning is: I will bring it to you in less than the time between looking at something and knowing about it.

One exegete has said: *Ṭarf* is to open the eyes, and the *irtidād* of *ṭarf* is to close them. Since this is a natural and involuntary act, the verse has used the verb in the form *irtidād* instead of *radd*.[1] It says *yartadda ilayka*, not *yarudda ilayka*.

The mistake of this exegete is that blinking, like breathing, is a voluntary human act; however, both of them are directed by the human nature.

Hebrew is *ehyeh asher ehyeh*, meaning "I am that I am," which is how God introduces Himself to Moses in Exodus 3:14. (Trans.)

1 *Irtidād* means "to be returned," while *radd* means "to return." Semantically, the former is passive while the latter is active. (Trans.)

That is why their occurrence does not require one to think beforehand, as opposed to acts such as eating and drinking. A voluntary act is one that is done by the human will and volition (*irādah*), and this is not limited to acts that are preceded by thought and reflection. What made this exegete fall into this mistake was his presumption that an act out of will is the same as an act out of thinking. Perhaps the reason why the verse has used *irtidād* instead of *radd* is that since blinking does not hinge on thinking, it is *as if* it occurs on its own and without the person's will.

This sentence—"*I will bring it to you before your glance returns to you*"—is addressed to Solomon, because he was the one who asked for the throne to be brought to him. Therefore, he is the one who is meant to find the throne before him.

Some exegetes have said: The sentence is addressed to the audacious jinn who said: *I will bring it to you before you rise up from your place* (27:39). The speaker—that is, "*one who had a knowledge of the Book*"—was Solomon. He made this statement to show the merit of prophethood, and that the One Who enabled him to do this by teaching him knowledge of the Book is greater than the power in which the audacious jinn took pride. Thus the meaning is: When the audacious jinn said what he said, Solomon told him, "I will bring the throne to you before your glance returns to you."

The author of *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* [that is, al-Rāzī] has insisted on this view, and has mentioned several arguments in support of it. However, they are all weak arguments, and the whole interpretation does not comply with the theme and context of the verse, as opposed to our interpretation above.

… Then when he saw it settled beside him, he said: This is of the grace of my Lord that He may try me whether I am grateful or ungrateful…: That is: when Solomon saw the throne settled by him, he said, "*This*"—the appearance of the throne and its placement before me in less than the blink of an eye—"*is of the grace of my Lord*"—not because of my own merit or desert—"*that He may try me*"—that He may test me—"*whether I am grateful or ungrateful*"—toward His bounty and blessing.

… And whoever is grateful, he is grateful only for his own soul…: That is, the benefit of his gratitude returns to himself no to my Lord.

… and whoever is ungrateful* (kafara, from kufr)*, then surely my Lord is Self-sufficient, Honored: The word *kufr* here means "ungratefulness" [not disbelief]. The second half of the verse ["*and whoever is grateful…*"] emphasizes the first half which describes this phenomenon as a

grace of God.

Some exegetes have said that the demonstrative "this" [in "*This is of the grace of my Lord*"] refers to the *ability* to bring the throne [as opposed to the *appearance* of the throne], whether directly by himself, or indirectly through means and intermediaries.

The problem with this interpretation is that the expression "*then when he saw it settled beside him*" suggests that his praise pertained to the state of *seeing*, and what he saw was the *presence* of the throne before him, not the *ability* to bring it, which had existed prior to that.

This verse contains an implied omission. What is implied is: "Solomon gave him permission to bring the throne as he had said, and he did so. *Then when he saw it settled beside him…*" The omission of the implied part serves to indicate the speed of his action, as if there were no time lag between his claim about bringing the throne (as he said) and seeing it before him.

قالَ نَكِّرُوا لَها عَرْشَها نَنْظُرْ أَ تَهْتَدِی أَمْ تَكُونُ مِنَ الَّذِينَ لا يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

(27:41) ***He said: Alter*** **(nakkirū, from tankīr)** ***her throne for her; we will see whether she follows the right way or is of those who do not go aright.***

Al-Mufradāt says:

> *Tankīr* is to change something so that it cannot be recognized. God says: *He said: Alter her throne for her* (27:41). *Taʿrīf* [the opposite of *tankīr*] to alter something so that it is recognized.

The context suggests that Solomon said this when the Queen of Sheba and her chiefs had come to him and were about to meet him. His purpose was to test their intellect, just as his purpose in bringing the throne was to show her an evident sign of his prophethood. That is why he ordered the throne to be altered, and justified it by: *we will see whether she follows the right way.…* The meaning of the verse is clear.

فَلَمَّا جاءَتْ قِيلَ أَ هكَذا عَرْشُكِ قالَتْ كَأَنَّهُ هُوَ وَ أُوتِينَا الْعِلْمَ مِنْ قَبْلِها وَ كُنَّا مُسْلِمِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾

(27:42) ***So when she came, it was said: Is your throne like this? She***

said: It is as it were the same, and we were given the knowledge before it, and we were submissive.

That is, when the queen came to Solomon, she was asked on behalf of Solomon, "*Is your throne like this?*" This question was meant for testing [not for learning].

She was not asked "Is this your throne?" but "Is this *similar* to your throne?" in order to make the matter more ambiguous to her. In other words, she was asked about the similarity between her throne and the throne that was shown to her in terms of its shape and characteristics. This manner of questioning is a way of obfuscating (*tankīr*).

… She said: It is as it were the same…: What she meant was, "It is the same," but she said this in the form of analogy and comparison [by saying *ka-anna*, "as it were"] to avoid jumping to a conclusion without solid grounds. It is common to express initial beliefs that yet have to be verified in the form of likening and comparison [by using "as if" or "like"].

… and we were given the knowledge before it, and we were submissive: There are two possibilities for the pronoun "it" in "before it": (1) It refers to the bringing of the throne [as an external event]. (2) It refers to the state of seeing the throne after it had been brought [as a mental state and condition]. The context shows that this sentence is the continuation of the queen's speech. When she saw the throne and was asked about it, she realized that this was an allusion to the extraordinary power that God had bestowed upon Solomon. Thus she answered, "*and we were given the knowledge before it…*," meaning that there is no need for such an allusion or reminder, because we already knew about his power before the occurrence of this miracle—or before our current condition.

… and we were submissive: That is, we were obedient to Solomon.

Here are some other views for the speaker of "*and we were given the knowledge…*":

(1) These are Solomon's words.

(2) They are the words of Solomon's people.

(3) They are the words of the queen, but she meant that she already knew that the throne had been brought there.

However, all of these views are implausible.

وَ صَدَّها ما كانَتْ تَعْبُدُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنَّها كانَتْ مِنْ قَوْمٍ كافِرِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

(27:43) ***And what she worshiped besides Allah prevented her* (ṣaddahā), *surely she was of an unbelieving people.***

Ṣadd means "to prevent, to turn away." Here, it means being prevented from submitting to God. She submits later when she is ordered to enter the palace, whereby she testifies: *I submit with Solomon to Allah, the Lord of the worlds* (27:44). What she said in the previous verse—that "*we were submissive*" (27:42)—pertains to her submission and obedience to Solomon [not to God].[1]

This is what can be inferred from the theme and context of the verses. Exegetes have suggested other meanings for the verse, which we shall skip.

… surely she was of an unbelieving people: This sentence serves to explain and justify the first part of the verse. The implied meaning is: What she worshiped besides God—that is, the sun, as mentioned in the hoopoe's report [27:24]—prevented her from submitting to God, and the reason for this was that she was from an unbelieving people. Thus she followed them in their unbelief.

قِيلَ لَهَا ادْخُلِي الصَّرْحَ فَلَمَّا رَأَتْهُ حَسِبَتْهُ لُجَّةً وَ كَشَفَتْ عَنْ ساقَيْها
قالَ إِنَّهُ صَرْحٌ مُمَرَّدٌ مِنْ قَوارِيرَ قالَتْ رَبِّ إِنِّي ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي وَ أَسْلَمْتُ
مَعَ سُلَيْمانَ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعالَمِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾

(27:44) ***It was said to her: Enter the palace* (al-ṣarḥ). *But when she saw it she deemed it to be a great expanse of water* (lujjah), *and bared her legs. He said: Surely it is a palace made smooth* (mumarrad) *with glass* (qawārīr). *She said: My Lord! Surely I have been unjust to myself, and I submit with Solomon to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.***

There are three meanings for *ṣarḥ*: (1) It means *qaṣr* (palace, castle). (2) It means any building that is higher than the other buildings and overlooks them. (3) It means a wide and unroofed area. *Lujjah* means "a great

1 Her submission to Solomon, mentioned in verse 27:42 is in line with Solomon's instruction in verse 27:31 (*come to me in submission*). Both verses refer to political submission and military peace, as opposed to confrontation and war. However, the current verse and the next one (27:43-44) are about her submission to God in terms of belief. (Trans.)

amount of water." *Mumarrad* means "that which has been smoothened and refined." *Qawārīr* means "glass."

It was said to her: Enter the palace…: Apparently, the speaker of these words was one of Solomon's servants, while Solomon was also there. It is common that when kings and leaders of a nation visit their counterparts in another country, they are ushered in by the host's retinue [but not directly by the host].

But when she saw it she deemed it to be a great expanse of water, and bared her legs…: That is, when she saw the palace, she thought that it was an expanse of water because it was covered by glass which was so clear that it looked like water. She bared her feet by lifting up her dress so that the bottom of her dress would not get wet.

… He said: Surely it is a palace made smooth with glass…: The speaker here is Solomon. He informed her that it was not an expanse of water, but it was a palace made smooth with glass. When she saw the magnificence of Solomon's kingdom—and she had already seen the hoopoe, her gifts returned, and her throne brought there—she was left with no doubt that these were signs of his prophethood, not a scheme or plan. At that point she said: *My Lord! Surely I have been unjust to myself….*

… She said: My Lord! Surely I have been unjust to myself, and I submit with Solomon to Allah, the Lord of the worlds: She first took recourse to her Lord by acknowledging that she had wronged herself for not serving God from the beginning, or for not converting sooner, when she had seen the above signs. Then she testified that she submits to God with Solomon.

… and I submit with Solomon to Allah, the Lord of the worlds: Here there is a shift from the second person (speaking to God, swt) to the third person (not speaking to God). This shows a shift from an overall expression of belief in God—where she said, "*My Lord! Surely I have been unjust to myself*"—to an explicit expression of monotheism (*tawḥīd*). She testified that her submission to God is "with Solomon," meaning the same kind of submission as Solomon's, which was [pure] monotheism. She then emphasized this explicit expression of her monotheism by describing God as "*the Lord of the worlds*," meaning that there is no lord other than Him for any being in any realm of existence. This is God's unity in Lordship, which necessitates His unity in worship, which is not held by polytheists.

The Story of Prophet Solomon

His Story in the Qur'an: The Noble Qur'an has presented only a sample of Solomon's stories. Nonetheless, reflecting on these verses would provide an overall understanding of his life and his noble personality. Some of the points mentioned in the Qur'an are:

He inherited from his father David. God says: *And We gave to David Solomon* (38:30); *And Solomon inherited from David* (27:16).

He was given a mighty kingdom; he ruled over the jinn, the birds and the wind; and he was taught the language of the birds. The Qur'an has frequently referred to these blessings, as one can see in verses 2:102, 21:81, 27:16-18, 34:12-13, 38:35-39.

There is hint at the story where a dead body was placed on his throne (38:34).

There is hint at the story where high-bred, swift horses were presented to him (38:31-33).

He was inspired with the correct judgment about the sheep that had strayed in the tillage (21:78-79).

There is the story of the ant (27:18-19).

There is the story of the hoopoe, and its subsequent story about Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (verses 27:20-44).

There is a brief account of how he died (34:14).

We have discussed each of these stories specifically under the relevant verses.

His Praise in the Qur'an: The Book of God has mentioned Solomon's name with high regard and much praise in over ten verses. Here is how the Qur'an has honored him:

He is called a "frequently returning servant [to his Lord]," where God says: *Most excellent the servant! Surely he was frequent in returning (to Allah)* (38:30).

He is characterized with knowledge and judgment. God says: *So We made Solomon to understand it; and to each one We gave wisdom and judgment* (21:79); *And certainly We gave knowledge to David and Solomon* (27:15); *He said: O people! We have been taught the language of birds* (27:16).

He is named among the guided prophets, where God says: *And Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon* (4:163); *And Noah did We guide before, and of his descendants, David and Solomon* (6:84).

His Description in the Old Testament: Solomon's story is mentioned in the first book of Kings, which has elaborated on his majesty, his magnificence, the expanse of his kingdom, the abundance of his wealth and the degree of his wisdom. His only story which matches the Qur'an is his story with the Queen of Sheba. When she heard about Solomon, his building of God's house in Jerusalem, and the wisdom that he had been given, she went to see him with many gifts. There she met him and asked him some questions to test him. He answered her questions, and then she returned.[1]

The Old Testament demeans him by saying that toward the end of his life, he prostrated to the idols of some of his wives, and thus deviated from the worship of God to the worship of idols.[2] It also says that his mother was the wife of Uriah the Hittite, but David fell in love with her and slept with her unlawfully. Then, because she became pregnant, David plotted to have her husband killed in a battle. Then David married her, whereupon she fell pregnant a second time, and gave birth to Solomon.[3]

However, his record in the Noble Qur'an is clear of the first calumny [about disbelief and polytheism] since he is counted among God's prophets, who are explicitly declared to be guided and infallible. In addition to this general exoneration, the Qur'an says particularly about him: *And Solomon disbelieved not* (2:102).

The Qur'an has also cleared his record of the second accusation [about his birth] by narrating his supplication when he heard the speech of the ant: *My Lord! Inspire me that I should be grateful for Thy favor which Thou hast bestowed on me and on my parents* (27:19). As we explained in the exposition of the verse, this supplication indicates that his mother was on the straight path, among "*those upon whom Allah has bestowed favors, of the prophets and the truthful and the martyrs and the righteous*" (4:69).

Narrations About his Story

The narrations about his story, especially the story of the hoopoe and

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1 1 Kings 10.

2 See 1 Kings 11. Note that the Old Testament talks about Solomon going after these gods and goddesses, building high places for them, burning incense there, and sacrificing to them. The author has referred to these as "prostration." (Trans.)

3 2 Samuel 11 and 12.

his following encounter with the Queen of Sheba, are mostly peculiar accounts, the like of which is rarely found even in fictitious tales. A sound intellect cannot accept them; they are falsified by certain history; and most of them are exaggerations narrated by the likes of Kaʿb [al-Aḥbār] and Wahab [b. Munabbih].

They have taken the exaggeration to the point where they have narrated that he ruled over the entire earth for 700 years; all humankind, jinn, wild animals and birds were his hosts; 600,000 chairs were placed in his court where thousands of prophets and hundreds of thousands of rulers from men and jinn used to sit.

Moreover, they have said that the mother of the Queen of Sheba was a jinn, and the queen's feet were hooved like the hoofs of a donkey. That is why she used to cover her feet from the sight of others, until she unveiled them when she wanted to enter the palace, and that was when her secret was disclosed. Her majesty was such that she had 400 kings under her supervision, each ruling over a city with an army of 400,000. She had 300 viziers who used to govern her kingdom, and she had 12,000 generals who headed an army of 12,000 soldiers each. And on it goes with other strange reports. We can only count these as inauthentic pre-Islamic narrations that should be dismissed.[1]

Examining Narrations

(1) When Faṭimah learnt that Abū Bakr had decided to take Fadak away from her, she went to him and said: O Abū Quhāfa! Is it in the Book of God that you shall inherit from your father but I shall not inherit from mine? *Indeed you have come up with a strange thing* (19:27). Do you deliberately abandon the Book of God and fling it behind your backs?[2] For it says: *And Solomon inherited from David* (27:16)….[3]

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1 For those who are interested in learning about these narrations, see collections of hadith such as *al-Durr al-manthūr* [by al-Suyūṭī], *ʿArāʾis al-Majālis* [by al-Thaʿlabī] and *Biḥar al-Anwār* [by al-Majlisī], as well as lengthy works of *tafsīr*. (Auth.)

2 This sentence is deduced from the verse 3:187. (Trans.)

3 *Al-Iḥtijāj*, on the authority of ʿAbd-Allāh b. al-Ḥasan, via his chain of narration, from his fathers.

(2) Concerning the verb *yūzaʿūna* in the verse, "*And they were formed into groups* (yūzaʿūna)" (27:17) Imam al-Bāqir said: [It means] those in the front were withheld to be joined by those in the back.[1]

(3) Imam ʿAlī said in a hadith: In some dialects, *nāẓirah* means *muntaẓirah* (awaiting). Have you not heard the verse: *And I shall wait to see* (fa-nāẓirah) *what (answer) the messengers bring back* (27:35)?[2]

(4) Imam al-Bāqir said: The Greatest Name of God is composed of 73 letters. Asaph possessed only one of its letters. By uttering it, he caused the land between him and the throne of Bilqīs to sink. He picked up the throne with his hand and then the land returned to its original state. He did all that faster than the blink of an eye. However, 72 of those letters are with us [Ahl al-Bayt], and one letter is exclusively held by God in His knowledge of the unseen. There is no movement or power save by God, the Almighty, the Magnificent.[3]

Author's comment: The same idea has been narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq. It has also been narrated in *al-Kāfī*, on the authority of Jābir, from Imam al-Bāqir, and on the authority of al-Nawfalī, from Imam al-Hādī.

The Imam's statement that the Greatest Name has so many letters does not contradict what we said before—that the Name is not verbal—because the very tone and context of this statement shows that what is meant by "letter" here is not verbal. The Imam has used this term because people's impression of "name" is a noun consisting of vocalized letters.

(5) Concerning "*before your glance returns to you*" (27:40) *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: It means that the earth was rolled up for him. This is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq.[4]

Author's comment: The rolling (*ṭayy*) of the earth does not contradict

1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū Jārūd.

2 *Al-Iḥtijāj*.

3 *Al-Baṣāʾir*, via its chain of narration.

4 This is the fifth view mentioned among a list of other interpretations in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

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the sinking (*khasf*) of the earth mentioned in the previous narration. *Majmaᶜ al-bayān* has mentioned five other interpretations for the verse: (a) The angels brought the throne to him [Solomon]. (b) The wind brought it. (c) God created a sequence of movements in it. (d) It suddenly disappeared from its place, and reappeared in front of Solomon. (e) God annihilated it where it was initially, and recreated it before Solomon.

Some exegetes have suggested another possibility: Existence is constantly renewed in beings, every moment similar to their previous existence. God effused existence upon Sheba's throne in the previous moment [while it was in Sheba], then the next moment He effused existence upon it in front of Solomon.

However, some of the above interpretations are rationally impossible—such as the fifth one—and for some of them there is no evidence—like the rest.

(6) Once Yaḥyā b. Aktham met Mūsā b. Muḥammad b. ᶜAlī b. Mūsā [that is, Imam al-Jawād's son]. Then Yaḥyā asked him some questions to Mūsā. Mūsā says: Later I went to my brother ᶜAlī b. Muḥammad, where he admonished me and raised my awareness about his authority. I told him, "My I be sacrificed for you! The son of Aktham has asked me to issue rulings and make judgments concerning some questions."[1]

The Imam smiled and said, "Did you do so?" I said, "No."

"Why not?" he asked. "Because I did not have the knowledge," I answered.

He said, "What were the questions?" "He asked about Solomon," I explained, "was he in *need* of the knowledge of Asaph son of Berachiah?" (Here Mūsā listed some other questions as well.)

The Imam told him, "Write, O my brother," and he dictated what he should write [to Yaḥyā] as follows: "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. You asked about God's speech in His Book: *One who had a knowledge of the Book said* (27:40). That was Asaph son of Berachiah, but Solomon also had access to what Asaph knew. However, Solomon wanted his nation, including

1 According to the narration in *Tuḥaf al-ᶜuqūl*, Yaḥyā asked a series of questions in writing. This is confirmed by the subsequent part of the hadith, where the Imam tells Mūsā to *write back* to Yaḥyā. (Trans.)

both the jinn and humankind, to know that Asaph would be the authority after him. What Asaph knew was in fact part of Solomon's knowledge, which he conferred to Asaph by God's command. God gave him [Asaph] this knowledge[1] so that there would be no disagreement about him as an imam and guide. This was just like the case of Solomon, who was given knowledge during the life of David so that his Imamate (leadership) and prophethood would be known after him. All that was to emphasize God's proof against the creatures."[2]

Author's comment: The author of *Rūḥ al-maʿānī* has narrated this hadith from *Majmaʿ al-bayān*. Then he adds, "And you can see the problem with it." However, there is no point to his objection except that he was not excited to see a mention of Imamate (leadership) in it.

(7) Imam ʿAlī said: Be more hopeful of what you do not expect than what you do expect, because indeed… the Queen of Sheba went out [from her land] but ended up submitting [to God, or embracing Islam] with Solomon.[3]

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1 According to another version of the narration, "Solomon taught this knowledge to Asaph…" (Trans.)

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, from *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, via its chain of narration.

3 *Nūr al-thaqalayn*, from *al-Kāfī*.

Verses 45-53

These verses summarize the story of the prophet Ṣāliḥ and his people. The aspect of warning in this story dominates the aspect of glad tidings, as we mentioned at the beginning of the chapter.

وَ لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنا إِلى ثَمُودَ أَخاهُمْ صالِحاً أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ فَإِذا هُمْ فَرِيقانِ يَخْتَصِمُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

(27:45) *And certainly We sent to Thamūd their brother Ṣāliḥ, saying: Serve Allah. And lo* (fa-idhā)*! They became two sects* (farīqān) *quarrelling with each other* (yakhtaṣimūna, from ikhtiṣām and takhāṣum).

Ikhtiṣām and *takhāṣum* mean "to quarrel with one another." *Farīqān* (two sects) is in the dual form (*tathniya*) while the verb *yakhtaṣimūna* is a plural conjugation. The verse has used a plural verb (*yakhtaṣimūna*) for a dual noun (*farīqān*) because what is meant by "two sects" is his entire nation. *Fa-idhā* is *fujāʾiyyah* [that is, it means "and all of a sudden, unexpectedly"].

The meaning is: I swear that We certainly sent Ṣāliḥ to Thamūd, where Ṣāliḥ was their brother, meaning their relative. It was expected of them to be united in faith, but all of a sudden, they divided into two sects: believers and disbelievers. They started quarrelling about the truth, each saying, "The truth is with me."

Perhaps what is meant by their "quarrelling" is what God has narrated about them elsewhere, where He says: *The chief of those who behaved proudly among his people said to those who were considered weak, to those who believed from among them: Do you know that Ṣāliḥ has been sent by his Lord? They said: Surely we are believers in what he has been sent with. Those who were haughty said: Surely we are deniers of what you believe in* (7:75-76). This shows that one of the two sects was a group of a lower social class that believed in him, and the other sect was the proud chiefs (*al-mustakbirūn*). The rest of "those who were considered weak" (*al-mustaḍʿafūn*) were followers of their chiefs.

قالَ يا قَوْمِ لِمَ تَسْتَعْجِلُونَ بِالسَّيِّئَةِ قَبْلَ الْحَسَنَةِ لَوْ لا تَسْتَغْفِرُونَ اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

(27:46) ***He said: O my people! Why do you seek to hasten*** **(tastaʿjilūna, from istiʿjāl)** ***on the evil before the good? Why do you not ask forgiveness of Allah so that you may be dealt with mercifully?***

What is meant by "*istiʿjāl* of evil before the good" is that they were eagerly asking for punishment instead of mercy [based on the verbal pattern *istifʿāl*]. The subsequent part of the verse explains this: "If you are indeed seeking the good instead of the evil, then you should know that the good [that is, God mercy] is the fruit of believing in Him and asking Him for forgiveness." We can infer from Ṣāliḥ's rebuke that he said this statement after they hamstrung the she-camel, where they told him: *O Ṣāliḥ! Bring us what you threatened us with, if you are one of the messengers* (7:77). Hence, by saying, "*Why do you not ask forgiveness of Allah so that you may be dealt with mercifully?*" he urged them to believe and repent so that God may show mercy to them and lift from them the punishment that He had promised them—"*a promise not to be belied*" (11:65).

قالُوا اطَّيَّرْنا بِكَ وَ بِمَنْ مَعَكَ قالَ طائِرُكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ تُفْتَنُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

(27:47) ***They said: We take for a bad omen*** **(iṭṭayarnā, from taṭayyur)** ***you and those with you. He said: Your bad omen*** **(ṭāʾirukum)** ***is with Allah; nay, you are a people who are tried.***

Ṭaṭayyur means *tashaʾʾum* (interpreting something as a bad omen, ascribing misfortune to something, taking something to augur ill). This act was called *taṭayyur* (lit. "ascribing to birds") because birds were frequently used in deducing such evil omens. Likewise, one's share of evil and misfortune is called *ṭāʾir* (lit. "bird").[1]

… We take for a bad omen you and those who are with you…: They said this to Ṣāliḥ. That is: We consider you, the believers, and your followers

1 This term is also used in verses 7:131, 17:13 and 36:19. (Trans.)

to be bad luck because your rise with your call and their belief in you coincide with the difficulties and tribulations that have afflicted us. Thus we do not believe in you.

… He said: Your bad omen is with Allah; nay, you are a people who are tried: What he meant by "bad omen" is their share of evil and misfortune, which would be the punishment that they deserve because of their actions. That is in the hands of God alone [awaiting them while they are given respite].

That is why he then switched to saying: *nay, you are a people who are tried*. That is: You are being tested with good and evil, so that the believers may be distinguished from the disbelievers, and the obedient from the disobedient.

The meaning of the verse is: Ṣāliḥ's people told him, "We consider you and those who are with you to be bad luck. That is why we do not believe in you and we do not ask God for forgiveness." Ṣāliḥ replied, "Your omen that bears your share of evil is with God, and that is your book of deeds. Neither I nor those who are with me have any control over you so that we may bring about these tribulations upon you. Rather, you are a people who are being tried and tested by these matters, so that those who are obedient believers may be set apart from those who are disobedient unbelievers."

Some exegetes have said: A *ṭāʾir* is any source of good or evil that reaches a person. In the past, they used birds not only to read evil omens, but also to read good omens. Therefore, *ṭāʾir* is anything that harbingers either good or evil for the person, as seen in God's Book: *And We have made every man's bird of omen* (ṭāʾirah) *cling to his neck, and We will bring forth a book to him on the Day of Resurrection* (17:13). But we also know that any good or evil that faces humankind is by God's decree and is [eternally] written in a book. Therefore, *ṭāʾir* is the same as the Guarded Book [that is, the Guarded Tablet, *al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*] which includes whatever has been ordained for humankind.

The problem with this view is that the verse in Sūrah al-Isrāʾ shows that what is meant by *ṭāʾir* is the book of deeds, not the book of decree, because the verse says: *Read your book; your own self is sufficient as a reckoner against you this day* (17:14).

Some have suggested that "*you are a people who are tried* (tuftanūna)" means "you are being punished (*tuʿadhdhibūna*)." However, our suggested interpretation above is more plausible.

وَ كانَ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ تِسْعَةُ رَهْطٍ يُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَ لا يُصْلِحُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

(27:48) ***And there were in the city nine persons*** **(rahṭ)** ***who made mischief in the land and did not act aright.***

Al-Rāghib says, "*Raht* is a group of people fewer than ten, but it has also been defined as extending up to forty." Others have said that the difference between *rahṭ* and *nafar* is that the former is between three and seven—or ten—individuals, while the latter is between three and nine.

Others have said: *Raht* here means *ashkhāṣ* (persons, in plural). Its plural meaning matches its role as a *tamyīz* (specification, distinguishing qualifier) for the number nine [which is also plural]. It means that those who made a pledge with each other were nine men.

قالُوا تَقاسَمُوا بِاللَّهِ لَنُبَيِّتَنَّهُ وَ أَهْلَهُ ثُمَّ لَنَقُولَنَّ لِوَلِيِّهِ ما شَهِدْنا مَهْلِكَ أَهْلِهِ وَ إِنَّا لَصادِقُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

(27:49) ***They said: Swear to each other*** **(taqāsamū)** ***by Allah that we will certainly make a sudden attack on him and his family*** **(ahlahu)** ***by night*** **(la-nubayitannahu, from tabyīt)***, then we will say to his heir: We did not witness the destruction of his family, and we are most surely truthful.***

Taqāsum means "to vow mutually." *Tabyīt* is "to harm someone at night." The *ahl* of someone are "those who share the same house, lineage or religion with him." Perhaps what is meant by *ahl* here is his wife and children, as evidenced by what follows: *then we will say to his heir…*

… and we are most surely truthful: The conjunction "and" shows that this sentence adds to: *We did not witness…* Therefore, it is a continuation of what they would say [to his heir].

The meaning is: The mischievous group vowed by God with each other and said, "We will certainly kill him and his family at night. Then, when his heir comes after us and asks for his blood-money, we will tell him, 'We did not witness the death of his family, and surely we are truthful in what we are telling you.'"

As some exegetes have pointed out, saying that "we did not witness the death of his family" entails, by necessity or by priority, that "we did not witness his death either."

Some have said: The conjunction "and" in "*and we are most surely truthful*" is *ḥāliyyah*, which means: "We will truthfully tell this to his heir. It is the truth because we did not witness the destruction of his family *alone*, but we witnessed the destruction of him *and* his family together."

However, this interpretation is clearly contrived. Others have suggested more contrived interpretations to justify the last piece as describing their state of speaking (being *ḥāliyyah*), but there is no need to hold such an interpretation.

وَ مَكَرُوا مَكْراً وَ مَكَرْنا مَكْراً وَ هُمْ لا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

(27:50) ***And they plotted a plot, and We plotted a plot while they perceived not.***

Their plot was their mutual agreement and pledge to attack him and his family, as seen in the previous verse. God's plot was His decree of their destruction, as seen in the next verse.

فَانْظُرْ كَيْفَ كانَ عاقِبَةُ مَكْرِهِمْ أَنَّا دَمَّرْناهُمْ وَ قَوْمَهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٥١﴾

(27:51) ***See, then, how was the end of their plot—We destroyed them* (dammarnāhum, from tadmīr) *and their people, all (of them).***

Tadmīr is "to destroy, to obliterate." The plural pronouns refer to *raht* (lit. group, family, tribe) [mentioned in verse 27:48]. The destruction of them and their people is described as "*the end of their plot*" in the sense that their plot called for God's plot as punishment, which in turn resulted in the destruction of them and their people.[1]

فَتِلْكَ بُيُوتُهُمْ خاوِيَةً بِما ظَلَمُوا إِنَّ فِي ذلِكَ لَآيَةً لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

(27:52) ***So those are their houses fallen down* (khāwiyah) *because they were unjust. Most surely there is a sign in this for a people who know.***

1 Their people partook in their plot because they were pleased and satisfied with it. This is seen in *Nahj al-balāghah*, Sermon 201. The author has explained this and quoted Imam ʿAlī's sermon in his discussion of verse 26:157 above. (Trans.)

Khāwiyah means *khāliyah* (empty, vacant). It is derived from *khawā'*, which means *khalā'* (hollow, empty). The rest of the verse is clear.

وَ أَنْجَيْنَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَ كانُوا يَتَّقُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

(27:53) ***And We delivered those who believed and who guarded (against evil)*** **(kānū yattaqūna, from taqwā).**

This verse involves good news for the believers, saying that they will be delivered. The verse follows that by adding "*and who guarded (against evil)*" because *taqwā* serves as a shield for *īmān* (belief, faith). God says: *And the end is for those who guard (against evil)* (7:128); *And the (good) end is for guarding (against evil)* (20:132).

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Verses 54-58

This is a summary of Lot's story, where the aspect of warning dominates the aspect of glad tidings, much like the previous story.

وَ لُوطاً إِذْ قالَ لِقَوْمِهِ أَ تَأْتُونَ الْفاحِشَةَ وَ أَنْتُمْ تُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾

(27:54) ***And (We sent) Lot, when he said to his people: What? Do you commit indecency*** **(al-fāḥishah)** ***while you see?***

It has been said that the conjunction "and" joins the verse to "*We sent…*" (27:45) in the previous story. Therefore, the same verb "sent" is implied in this verse: "And We certainly sent Lot…" This is what some exegetes have said. It could also be that the conjunction "and" joins the entire story of Lot to the entire story of Ṣāliḥ. Then the verb "remember" would be implied: "And remember Lot…" *Fāḥishah* means "something extremely reprehensible." Here it means "sodomy."

… while you see?: That is: "You commit indecency while you can see one another." This is equivalent to what is narrated from him elsewhere: *And you commit evil deeds in your assemblies?* (29:29). Some have suggested that it refers to seeing in the heart. The meaning would be: "You are aware of the indecency of this act." However, this is a stretch of the meaning [beyond textual and contextual evidence].

أَ إِنَّكُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ الرِّجالَ شَهْوَةً مِنْ دُونِ النِّساءِ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ تَجْهَلُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

(27:55) ***What? Do you indeed approach*** **(innakum la-taʾtūna)** ***men lustfully rather than women? Nay, you are a people who act ignorantly.***

This is a rhetorical question that implies denial and rebuke of their action. The question involves two articles of emphasis: *inna* and *lām* (in *innakum la-taʾtūna*). This shows that what is being questioned is so reprehensible that no one would approve of it. Irrespective of these points, the verse itself is an interpretation of "indecency" [in the previous verse].

… Nay, you are a people who act ignorantly (tajhalūna): The verb *tajhalūna* is in the present tense, which shows continuation. The meaning

is: You persist in your ignorant behavior. Thus, there is no point in rebuking and criticizing you, because you are not a people who would refrain.

The verse should have naturally used *yajhalūna* is in the third person, but it says *tajhalūna* in the second person (lit. "you are a people who acts ignorantly"). This is an example of using the effect instead of the cause. It is as if the verse is saying: Nay, you are a kind of people who act ignorantly, thus you act ignorantly.[1]

فَما كانَ جَوابَ قَوْمِهِ إِلاَّ أَنْ قالُوا أَخْرِجُوا آلَ لُوطٍ مِنْ قَرْيَتِكُمْ إِنَّهُمْ أُناسٌ يَتَطَهَّرُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾

(27:56) ***But the answer of his people was no other except that they said: Turn out Lot's followers from your town; surely they are a people who would keep pure!***

What is meant by "keeping pure" is that they keep away from this act. They used this expression to deride and mock them.

فَأَنْجَيْناهُ وَ أَهْلَهُ إِلاَّ امْرَأَتَهُ قَدَّرْناها مِنَ الْغابِرِينَ ﴿٥٧﴾

(27:57) ***But We delivered him and his family*** **(ahlihi)** ***except his wife; We ordained her to be of those who remained behind.***

What is meant by *ahl* here is his household in particular, based on what God says elsewhere: *But We did not find therein save a (single) house of those who submitted* (51:36).

… We ordained her to be of those who remained behind: That is: We included her among those who were left to be punished.

وَ أَمْطَرْنا عَلَيْهِمْ مَطَراً فَساءَ مَطَرُ الْمُنْذَرِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾

(27:58) ***And We rained on them a rain*** **(maṭaran)***, and evil was the rain of those who had been warned.*

1 Here is how the author's point can be rendered into English (although it is not an exact translation): The verse should have naturally said, "You are the kind of people that they act ignorantly" (where "they" is normally dropped in English). However, it says, "You are the kind of people that *you* act ignorantly." This shows an implied omission in the verse, which can be elaborated as seen at the end of the paragraph. (Trans.)

What rained upon them were stones of baked clay, based on the verse: *And We rained down upon them stones of baked clay* (15:74). The word *maṭaran* (a rain) is in the indefinite form (*nakirah*), which indicates type and kind in this verse. That is: We sent down upon them a kind of rain which had such a tremendous story.[1]

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1 In other words, the indefinite form here indicates the greatness and immensity of the kind of punishment that was rained down upon them. (Trans.)

Verses 59-81

The previous verses presented a sample of stories that God recounted about His consistent custom regarding humankind. He guides His servants and shows them the path of salvation in this life. He honors those who follow His direction to the straight path by choosing them and blessing them with magnificent favors. As with those who set partners for Him, turn away from His remembrance, and plot against Him, He seizes them by uprooting punishment and excruciating pain.

Here God makes a transition from those stories to praising Himself and sending peace upon His chosen servants. He explains that only He is worthy of worship, not any of the partners that the people associate with Him. Then He moves on to discuss His oneness, the truth of the hereafter, and other relevant beliefs. Thus the flow of the verses in the chapter is comparable to the flow of the verses in Chapter 19 (Maryam), which we discussed above.[1]

قُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ وَ سَلامٌ عَلى عِبادِهِ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفى آللَّهُ خَيْرٌ أَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

(27:59) ***Say: Praise be to Allah and peace be upon His servants whom He has chosen: is Allah better, or what they associate (with Him)?***

By recounting the stories of prophets and their nations in the previous verses, God outlined His ongoing custom in dealing with the previous nations. This includes how He treated their believers by choosing them and blessing them with abundant favors, as in the case of their prophets, and how He treated their disbelievers with punishment and destruction. Of course, He only does what is good and appropriate, and His custom follows His infinite wisdom. In this verse, God orders His prophet to praise and glorify Him, and to send peace upon His chosen servants. Then He asserts that He alone is the One Who shall be served and worshiped.

Thus, the verse involves a transition from telling stories to praising, sending peace and declaring God's unity. These are not mentioned as a

1 See volume 27 of the English translation. (Trans.)

conclusion to the previous discussion, although they effectively serve that purpose. Otherwise, the verse should have started by the letter *fā*ʾ (so, thus, therefore), which indicates consequence and conclusion.

Say: Praise be to Allah…: This is an order to praise God. The previous verses showed that the creation and management of everything go back to Him; He is the bestower of every good according to His wisdom; and He is the doer of every gracious action by His power. Therefore, this verse says that all praise ultimately belongs to Him.

… and peace be upon His servants whom He has chosen…: The conjunction "and" shows that the command "Say" also applies to this part of the verse. Therefore, this sentence is also part of what is ordered to be said. When one sends peace upon these chosen servants, it means that he must have removed any opposition or resistance that might be in his soul against them, for they bear God's guidance and its splendid fruits. This is what sending peace (*salām*) necessitates. Hence, the order to send peace involves an implicit order to prepare oneself for *accepting* what they have brought: their message of guidance and its implications. This is in a sense equivalent to the verse: *These are they whom Allah guided, therefore follow their guidance* (6:90). The reader should reflect on this.

… is Allah better, or what they associate (with Him)?: This is a continuation of God's address to the Prophet. The question is rhetorical and is meant to make the audience acknowledge what is being said. The verse is effectively saying: Given that all praise is due to God and that He chooses His special servants, it follows that He is better than their gods whom they serve, for these gods have neither created anything nor direct any affair to be praised for it. Nor do they possess any good to bestow upon their worshipers.

أَمَّنْ خَلَقَ السَّماواتِ وَ الْأَرْضَ وَ أَنْزَلَ لَكُمْ مِنَ السَّماءِ ماءً فَأَنْبَتْنا بِهِ حَدائِقَ ذاتَ بَهْجَةٍ ما كانَ لَكُمْ أَنْ تُنْبِتُوا شَجَرَها أَ إِلهٌ مَعَ اللَّهِ بَلْ هُمْ قَوْمٌ يَعْدِلُونَ ﴿٦٠﴾

(27:60) ***Rather, He Who*** (am-man) ***created the heavens and the earth, and sent down for you water from the sky; then We cause to grow thereby delightful gardens*** (ḥadāʾiq dhāt bahjah)***; it is not possible for you that you should make the trees thereof to grow. Is there a god with Allah? Nay! They are people who deviate.***

Ḥadāʾiq is the plural of *ḥadīqah*, which means "a garden that is surrounded and fenced by walls." *Dhāt bahjah* (delightful) is an adjective for gardens. *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says:

Dhāt bahjah means possessor of a beautiful scene that delights the viewer.[1] Since it is mentioned in the singular, it indicates that it is the quality of gardens as one unit. Otherwise, if the verse wanted to describe each garden individually, it would have said *dhawāt bahjah* (in plural).

The particle *am* (lit. "or") at the beginning of the verse is disconnected from the previous verse, and it implies the meaning of "nay" or "rather." The particle *man* (He Who…) is a subject whose predicate is omitted. The question in the verse is rhetorical, intended to make them acknowledge the truth. The verse only mentions one side of the comparison; the other side is omitted. The omitted parts can be inferred from the context as follows: "Rather, is He Who created the heavens and the earth… better, or what they associate with Him?" The next four verses follow the same style.[2]

The verse is saying: "*Rather, is He Who created the heavens and the earth, and sent down for you*"—that is, for your benefit—"*water from the sky*"—that is, rain—"*then We cause to grow thereby*"—that is, by that water—"*delightful gardens*"—that is, green and fresh gardens—"*it is not possible for you*"—that is, it is not up to you and within your ability—"*that you should make the trees thereof to grow. Is there a god with Allah?*" —the last part implies censure and rebuke.

The verse switches from the third person to the second person when it addresses the polytheists [in "*and sent down for you water…*"]. The point in this transition is to intensify the rebuke by directly addressing the audience instead of assuming them to be absent. The context of the previous verses can be compared to a case where a master is speaking to some of his elites about his disobedient servants who shirk from his service and

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1 *Bahjah* literally means "delight, joy"; and *dhāt* is a prefix for possession. So *dhāt bahjah* literally means "possessor of delight," or more fluently, "delightful." (Trans.)

2 In other words, the verse is essentially saying: "Rather, is God—Who is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the sender of rain, and the grower of delightful gardens that you could not have otherwise grown—*better or the gods that you associate with Him as partners*?" The latter part (italicized) is omitted as it is implied by the context of the verses. The same comparison and omission applies to the next four verses. (Trans.)

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complains about them, while the disobedient servants can also hear. Then, once he has presented his argument and evidence against them fully—as God says, "*is Allah better, or what they associate (with Him)?*" (27:59)—his excitement and frustration intensifies; therefore he addresses those servants directly after having turned his back to them. In like manner, God starts making the polytheists acknowledge the truth by reminding them of one sign after another, denying their association of partners for Him, and rebuking them for it. In these verses, God censures the polytheists because: (1) they have deviated and turned away from Him to others [27:60]; (2) most of them do not know [27:61]; and (3) it is seldom that they heed [27:62]. Meanwhile, He is exalted beyond their association of partners with Him [27:63], and they have no proof or argument for the gods that they serve [27:64].

… Nay! They are people who deviate (ya**ʿdilūna**)*:* That is: They deviate from the truth to falsehood, from God to other than Him. Some exegetes have said: It means that they set others equal (*ʿidl*) to Him and equate between the two sides [another meaning of *yaʿdilūna*, other than "to deviate and turn away"].

Either way, this sentence is addressed to the Prophet, which means another shift from the second person to the third person with regards to the polytheists. This transition is to indicate that there is no point in persuading them to follow the truth because they deviate from it.

أَمَّنْ جَعَلَ الْأَرْضَ قَراراً وَ جَعَلَ خِلالَها أَنْهاراً وَ جَعَلَ لَها رَواسِيَ وَ جَعَلَ بَيْنَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ حاجِزاً أَ إِلهٌ مَعَ اللَّهِ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

(27:61) ***Rather, He Who made the earth a resting place*** **(qarāran),** ***and made in it*** **(khilālahā)** ***rivers, and raised on it mountains*** **(rawāsī)** ***and placed between the two seas a barrier*** **(ḥājizan).** ***Is there a god with Allah? Nay! Most of them do not know!***

Qarār is a verbal noun (*maṣdar*) that serves as a nominative case (*fāʿil*) here.[1] *Khilāl* is the plural of *khalal*, meaning "a gap or opening between two things." *Rawāsī* is the plural of *rāsiyah*, meaning *thābitah* (stable, constant, fixed). Here it means "fixed mountains." *Ḥājiz* means a "barrier

1 That is, *qarār*, in this verse, is synonymous with *qārr* or *mustaqirr*, meaning "something that is resting, established, and fixed." (Trans.)

between two things".

The implied meaning is: "Rather, is He—Who has stabilized the earth such that it does not shake you, Who has made rivers to flow in the earth's fissures, Who has raised fixed mountains on the earth, and Who has placed a barrier between two seas that prevents them from mixing and blending—better or what you associate with Him?"

… Is there a god with Allah? Nay! Most of them do not know!: This part of the verse is similar to the end of the previous verse.

أَمَّنْ يُجِيبُ الْمُضْطَرَّ إِذا دَعاهُ وَ يَكْشِفُ السُّوءَ وَ يَجْعَلُكُمْ خُلَفاءَ الْأَرْضِ أَ إِلهٌ مَعَ اللَّهِ قَلِيلاً ما تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

(27:62) ***Rather, He Who answers the distressed one*** **(al-muḍtarr)** ***when he calls upon Him and removes the evil, and He will make you vicegerents in the earth. Is there a god with Allah? Little is it that you mind!***

What is meant by "answering the distressed one when he calls" is that God answers the supplications of those who call unto Him, and grants their requests. However, this has been qualified by "being distressed" (*iḍtirār*), which shows that the caller has realized the essence of supplication and prayer. It is obvious that as long as one is not entrapped by distress—when he has other choices to resort to for his need—true request and petition do not emanate from him.

Then, the verse adds another condition: *when he calls upon Him*. This indicates that the one who is called upon should be God alone, and that happens when the caller has been cut off from all apparent means. It is only then that one's heart clings to his Lord alone. But if one's heart is attached only to the apparent means, or to both his Lord and the means, then he is not really calling his Lord [alone], but he is calling other than Him.

If the person is sincere in his supplication and calls his Lord alone, then He answers him and removes the evil that led him to supplication, as He he has promised: *And your Lord says: Call upon Me, I will answer you* (40:60). In this verse [40:60], His answering is conditional on only two things: (1) the servant should offer genuine supplication (*duʿāʾ*); and (2) the one who is called should be God alone. He also says: *And when My servants ask you concerning Me, then surely I am very near; I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me* (2:186). We discussed the

meaning of supplication elaborately under verse 2:186.[1]

The above should clarify the implausibility of the following explanation offered by one exegete: The article *al-* in *al-muḍtarr* indicates *jins*, not *istighrāq*. That is, it does not mean *all* distressed individuals, but it means those who are distressed *overall*, as a genus. Otherwise, there are many distressed people who supplicate but whose calls are not answered. Thus the verse implies that God answers the calls of distressed people overall, not that He answers the call of every single one of them.

The problem with this interpretation is that the other two verses about supplication—"*And your Lord says: Call upon Me, I will answer you*" (40:60), and: "*Then surely I am very near; I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me*" (2:186)—do not comply with the idea that some supplications are *not* answered. Furthermore, we do not agree with his claim that "there are many distressed people who supplicate but whose calls are not answered." As we explained above, every supplication will be answered as long as: (1) it is a genuine call; and (2) it is made to God alone.

In addition, many verses say that humans turns their attention sincerely to their Lord at times of distress and desperation—like when they get on a ship—and their calls are answered. For instance God says: *And when affliction touches a man, he calls upon Us, whether lying on his side or sitting or standing* (10:12), and: *Until you are in the ships…and they become certain that they are encompassed about, they pray to Allah, being sincere to Him in obedience* (10:22). How can one imagine that the soul instinctively and naturally turns to something that it is not confident about? This [case of distress and desperation] is no different from other cases, when our soul recognizes someone who can fulfill its need. Whenever the human *fiṭrah* (innate nature, primary disposition, makeup) feels that the direction of its affairs is in the hands of someone, it guides the person to that source. In cases of distress and desperation, it realizes that this source is God.

One might object: In many cases we seek the apparent means to fulfill our needs even though we are not *certain* about their effectiveness in removing our needs; we only do so because we *hope* that they may be beneficial to us.

The answer is: These cases can be classified as "mental supplication," which is when we turn our attention to something based on some hope

1 See volume 3, pp. 35ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

and speculation. What we said above, however, is about "instinctive and natural supplication." Of course, even mental supplications involve a kind of instinctive supplication, in the sense that the person seeks *some* means in the absolute sense of it, and means in the absolute sense of it never fails. The reader should reflect on this.

Some exegetes have said: "The distressed who calls" means a sinner who asks for forgiveness. Surely God forgives him, and this is His answer.

However, this interpretation would still suffer from the problem of total inclusion (*istighrāq*),[1] because not every request for forgiveness is followed by forgiveness, nor is everyone who asks for forgiveness is forgiven. Moreover, there is no reason to qualify the absolute sense of *al-muḍtarr* (the distressed) to a sinner who has erred.

Some exegetes have said: *Al-muḍtarr* includes all distressed individuals, but God's answering should be qualified by His will, based on what He says elsewhere: *So He clears away that for which you pray if He wills* (6:41).

The problem with this view is that verse 6:41 is in a context that prevents it from qualifying the current verse. That context is: *Say: Tell me if the chastisement of Allah should overtake you or the Hour should come upon you, will you call (on others) besides Allah, if you are truthful? Nay, Him you call upon, so He clears away that for which you pray if He wills and you forget what you set up (with Him)* (6:40-41). The occurrence of "*the Hour*" [that is, the Resurrection] is an inevitable decree that one cannot ask to be removed. As with "*the chastisement of Allah*," if one wants to remove it by repentance and sincere belief, then God will remove it as He did so for the people of Jonah. But if one only asks for it verbally in order to be saved, then it will not be removed, because that is not a sincere request but is only a guile in the form of a request. That is what God has narrated from Pharaoh when he was about to drown: *He said: I believe that there is no god but He in Whom the Children of Israel believe and I am of those who submit. What? Now! And indeed you disobeyed before and were of the mischief-makers?* (10:90-91). He has also narrated from others who were overtaken by punishment: *They said: O woe to us! Surely we were unjust.*

1 All of these interpretations, including the author's, are meant to explain why many prayers seem to be unanswered. They contradict the absolute and universal promise that is inferred from the word *al-muḍtarr* (the distressed). The author's arguments in these paragraphs are meant to prove that his explanation is more plausible than its rival explanations. (Trans.)

And this ceased not to be their cry till We made them cut (21:14-15).

In short, verse 6:41 is qualified by "God's will" because it includes supplications that could be either real or unreal: *so He clears away that for which you pray if He wills* (6:41). It means that He clears them away when He wills, which is when there is a real request made out of belief. Otherwise, He does not clear them away if He does not will. That is different from the context of the current verse and the other verses that talk about how calls that are truly unto God alone are answered.

… and He will make you vicegerents* (khulafāʾ, from khilāfah) *in the earth…: Given the context, this pertains to the *khilāfah* (successorship, vicegerency) that God has bestowed upon humankind to reign over the earth and the creatures therein as they want. This refers to the verse: *And when your Lord said to the angels, I am going to place in the earth a viceroy* (2:30).

The vicegerency of humans refers to their use of the earth and its resources. It applies to human activities that pertain to their life and survival on the planet. Given this context, what is meant by "evil" in this verse—which puts people in a state of distress, where they ask God to remove it from them—must be events that prevent or limit their reign over the earth and their usage of its resources. Hence, the verse is about events that limit the life and survival of humankind in this world. This means that God's removal of evil [as He answers the call of the distressed] completes the reign and vicegerency of humankind [on earth].

The above meaning is further clarified if we interpret *duʿāʾ* (call, supplication, request) in "*when he calls upon Him*" in a broad sense that is not limited to verbal requests. This general sense can be inferred from the verses: *And He gives you of all that you ask Him* (14:34), and: *All those who are in the heavens and the earth ask of Him* (55:29). Based on this meaning, all the power and blessings that humans are given in this life, would be instances and applications of "the removal of evil from the distressed when he calls upon his Lord." Thus, humans are made vicegerents on the earth *as a result of* their call being answered and their evil being removal after their distress.

Here are two other suggested interpretations for the verse:

He makes you successors to the disbelievers by having you settle in their towns and obey God there after their polytheism and defiance.

The problem with this interpretation is that the address in this

verse—just as in the previous five verses—is to the disbelievers, but this interpretation assumes that the address is made to be the believers.

He makes you successors to the previous nations on the earth, where you settle in their homes and live after them.

However, our interpretation above complies better with the context.

… Little is it that you mind **(tadhakkarūna)***:* This sentence rebukes the disbelievers. It has also been recited as a third person verb (*yadhdhakkarūna*), which is more plausible because it complies better with the endings of the other five verses in this thread, such as: *Nay! They are people who deviate* (27:60), and: *Nay! Most of them do not know!* (27:61). All of those endings are directed at the Prophet and they indicate a shift of address, as we discussed above [under verse 27:60].

أَمَّنْ يَهْدِيكُمْ فِي ظُلُماتِ الْبَرِّ وَ الْبَحْرِ وَ مَنْ يُرْسِلُ الرِّياحَ بُشْراً بَيْنَ يَدَيْ رَحْمَتِهِ أَ إِلهٌ مَعَ اللَّهِ تَعالَى اللَّهُ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

(27:63) ***Rather, He Who guides you in utter darkness of the land and the sea, and Who sends the winds as good news before His mercy. Is there a god with Allah? Exalted by Allah above what they associate (with Him).***

Saying "*utter darkness of the land and the sea*" is a figurative expression, because what is really meant is "utter darkness *of night* in the land and in the sea." Winds are sent as good news in the sense that they harbinger rain before its fall. "Mercy" here means "rain." The rest of the verse is clear.

أَمَّنْ يَبْدَؤُا الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُ وَ مَنْ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِنَ السَّماءِ وَ الْأَرْضِ أَ إِلهٌ مَعَ اللَّهِ قُلْ هاتُوا بُرْهانَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صادِقِينَ ﴿٦٤﴾

(27:64) ***Rather, He Who originates the creation, then reproduces it and Who gives you sustenance from the heaven and the earth. Is there a god With Allah? Say: Bring your proof if you are truthful.***

The "origination of creation" refers to the beginning of its existence. Its "reproduction" refers to giving it existence again after the Resurrection. The verse draws on the Resurrection to argue against polytheists even though they do not accept it, as He mentions below: *And those who disbelieve say…* (27:67). This is because the Resurrection is taken as an accepted

fact in the Qur'an due to many decisive proofs for it in the Book. Then the following verses complement the discussion by referring to their denial and/or doubt concerning the hereafter.

Some exegetes have said: The origination and reproduction of creation means the creation of one individual of a species, followed by the creation of other members of the species after its death. In other words, it refers to the creation of creatures of the same kind, one after another. This way one cannot object that the verse is arguing based on the hereafter against polytheists who do not believe in it.

However, this interpretation cannot easily be inferred from the apparent sense of the verse.

One of the subtle Qur'anic realities that this verse implies is that there is no extinction of existence whatsoever. Rather, what God brings to existence by origination returns to Him by His returning of it. What we observe as "extermination of something" is rather our missing it after having it for a while.

Theologians agree that it is impossible to bring certain things back to existence (called *iʿādat al-maʿdūm*) such as accidents (*aʿrāḍ*), but they differ about the possibility of bringing back other beings such as substances (*jawāhir*). That discussion, however, has nothing to do with the topic of resurrection as outlined in this verse, because resurrection is not a case of bringing back an annihilated thing. Therefore, the problem of whether that is possible or not is not applicable here. Instead, resurrection means that creatures return and go back to their Lord Who originated them, without any extinction or termination of their existence.

… and Who gives you sustenance from the heaven and the earth…: This sentence refers to God's direction of the affairs of people between their origination and their return. He provides them with sustenance through heavenly means like rain, as well as earthly ones like all that nurtures humankind.

… Say: Bring your proof if you are truthful: In the previous discussions, God provided various arguments about His creation and direction of everything, the connection between the direction of different affairs, and the connection of all of them to creation. The verses showed that creation (*khalq*, *khilqah*) and direction (*tadbīr*) are of the same reality which belongs to God and relies on Him. Through the above discussions, God proved that He is the Lord of everything and has no partner. A corollary

of this is that whatever is invoked besides God is not really a god and there is no valid argument for its divinity.

This is because *ulūhiyyah* (divinity, the quality of being worthy of worship) is a consequence of lordship, and a lord is one who directs the affairs of what he owns. A lord is to be served and worshiped as a means of showing gratitude for his blessings, or as a means of securing oneself from his punishment. Either way, worship directly relates to the direction of affairs, which is a branch of lordship.

The purpose of the arguments in the above verses was to negate the divinity of gods other than God, as indicated by His rhetorical question after each argument: *Is there a god with Allah?* That is why here God commands His Prophet to ask them to provide a proof for their gods being worthy of worship: *Say: Bring your proof* (27:64). This way, when they fail to do so it becomes clear that they are wrong in their claim. If they had any proof for the divinity of their gods, they must have attributed some role in the direction of affairs in the universe to them, but the fact of the matter is that all creation and direction belongs to God alone.

قُلْ لا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ فِي السَّماواتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ الْغَيْبَ إِلاَّ اللَّهُ وَ ما يَشْعُرُونَ أَيَّانَ يُبْعَثُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

(27:65) ***Say: No one in the heavens and the earth knows the unseen but Allah; and they do not know when they shall be raised.***

In the previous verses God refuted the divinity of the gods of the polytheists by affirming that creation and direction solely belong to God. Then He commanded His prophet to ask them to bring a proof for their claim. Here He commands him for a second time to raise another argument against them that negates the divinity of their gods. The argument here is that their gods have no knowledge of the unseen, are ignorant of the Hour, and have no idea when they shall be raised. No one in the heavens and the earth knows the unseen or when they shall be raised, including their gods who consisted of the angels, the jinn, and human saints. Had they been gods that direct the affairs of the creatures, they should have known about the Hour, because retribution on the Day of Resurrection is a part of the direction of affairs of the creatures.

Given the above explanation, the first part of the verse—"*no one in the heavens and the earth knows the unseen but Allah*"—is a separate

argument that denies the divinity of their gods and proves it for God alone. Then, the second part of the verse—"*and they do not know when they shall be raised*"—is the most evident instance of the unseen and the most important type of it with regard to the direction of affairs, which has been added to the general argument.

This also clarifies that the two plural pronouns "they"—in "*they do not know*" and "*when they shall be raised*"—refer to "those in the heavens and the earth" [at the beginning of the verse]. Otherwise, the argument would be incomplete.

Some exegetes have said: Although the lack of knowledge includes their gods as well, these pronouns refer to the polytheists. Otherwise, there will be a split between the pronouns in this verse and the ones in the following verse—which certainly describe the polytheists.

The problem with this view is that it contradicts the purpose of the verse that we discussed above [that is, providing another argument against the divinity of their gods]. There is no problem in having a split between pronouns as long as there is a sign to indicate it.

بَلِ ادَّارَكَ عِلْمُهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ بَلْ هُمْ فِي شَكٍّ مِنْها بَلْ هُمْ مِنْها عَمُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾

(27:66) ***Nay, their knowledge fails*** **(iddāraka)** ***respecting the hereafter and hasty; nay, they are in doubt about it; nay, they are quite blind to*** **(minhā ʿamūn).**

ʿAmūn is the plural of *ʿumy* (blind). *Iddāraka* is originally the same as *tadāraka*, which is used when the parts of something follow one another in sequence [like a chain] until the end, where no part of the whole remains. What is meant by "*their knowledge fails respecting the hereafter*" is that they have used their share of knowledge for other matters to the point of exhaustion; thus they are left with no knowledge to apply to the matter of the hereafter. This is according to the verse: *therefore turn aside from him who turns his back upon Our reminder and does not desire anything but this world's life. That is their attainment of knowledge* (53:29-30).

After completing His arguments against the polytheists about how no one other than Him knows the time of the Resurrection, God turns back to His prophet and tells him that the polytheists are far from being addressed about this topic. This is because they have no knowledge about *anything* respecting the affairs of the hereafter, let alone the *time* of the

Hour. The reason for this is that they have used their share of knowledge in matters pertaining to the life of this world. As a result, they are in absolute ignorance about the hereafter. Even more, they doubt the hereafter and are uncertain whether it is real, as it is seen in their arguments against it, merely on the grounds that it seems unlikely. In fact, they are blind to it: God has made their hearts blind to accepting it and believing its truth.

The above explanation should clarify that the repetition of the word *bal* (nay, rather) shows that they have climbed the ladder of ignorance about the hereafter step by step, until they have reached the highest degree. These degrees are presented in the following sequence:

Nay, their knowledge fails respecting the hereafter…: That is, they have no knowledge of the hereafter, as if they have never heard of it.

Nay, they are in doubt about it: That is, they have heard about it and it has entered their hearts, but they doubted it and failed to accept it.

Nay, they are quite blind to it: That is, they have not rejected the belief in the hereafter on their own and by their volition, but they have become blind because God has blinded the eyes of their hearts. That is why there is no way that they can understand anything about its facts.

Some exegetes have said: *Tadāruk* here means "completion." The first part of the verse is saying is that their knowledge has reached the level of certainty as the arguments that prove the truth of the Resurrection have been perfected for them. This is said to rebuke their denial.

The problem with this interpretation is that it does not comply with the subsequent part of the verse, which makes a transitions to doubt and blindness.

وَ قالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَ إِذا كُنَّا تُراباً وَ آباؤُنا أَ إِنَّا لَمُخْرَجُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾

(27:67) ***And those who disbelieve say: What? When we have become dust and our fathers (too), shall we certainly be brought forth?***

This verse narrates the polytheists' arguments against the resurrection on the account that it is unlikely. That is: How could it be that we shall be brought forth from the earth as full human beings—as we are today—after we have died and turned into dust? And how could this be about our fathers?

لَقَدْ وُعِدْنا هذا نَحْنُ وَ آباؤُنا مِنْ قَبْلُ إِنْ هذا إِلاَّ أَساطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٦٨﴾

(27:68) ***We have certainly been promised this, we and our fathers before; these are naught but stories of the ancients.***

This verse is another argument by the polytheists that shows the improbability of the Resurrection. That is: We and our fathers were both promised by this Prophet and the previous prophets that we would be raised up after death. It is an old promise that we have always been told. Had it been true, it would have happened by now. Since it has not happened, it is one of those fables that the ancient people used to fabricate according to their imaginations and superstitions; the kind of tales that they enjoyed listening to.

قُلْ سِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَانْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كانَ عاقِبَةُ الْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٦٩﴾

(27:69) ***Say: travel in the earth, then see how was the end of the sinners.***

Here is how some exegetes have interpreted the verse: This is a threat and warning to the polytheists for denying the promises of God's prophet about the Resurrection. It orders them to journey throughout the land and see what was the end of the guilty people who rejected their prophets who warned them about the Resurrection. Indeed it should suffice as a lesson for those who are insightful to observe the end of their affair in their ruined homes and empty towns. In reality the verse is about "the deniers" (*al-mukadhdhibūn*) but it refers to them as "the sinners" (*al-mujrimūn*) in order to convey a subtle admonition to the believers: that they must abstain from sin.[1]

However, it is also possible to interpret the verse as an argument for the hereafter. It says that the sinners of the past nations ended up with exterminating punishment, which shows that sin and wrongdoing are not overlooked in this universe. Any action—whether good or evil—is recorded for its doer, and the doer shall be held accountable for it. Now, since not all actions are accounted for in this world—especially righteous deeds—they must be due for another realm, and that is the abode of the

1 "Sinners" is a broader group than "deniers" (that is, disbelievers). Not all sinners are among the disbelievers. Therefore, the verse wants to remind the believers that they should forsake sin, because sin is disliked by God, regardless of who commits it. The author has narrated this interpretation from Ālūsī's *Rūḥ al-maʿānī* in an abridged form. (Trans.)

hereafter.

This makes the verse equivalent to the verse: *Shall We treat those who believe and do good like the mischief-makers in the earth? Or shall We make those who guard (against evil) like the wicked?* (38:28). This interpretation is confirmed by the expression "*the end of the sinners*," because if the point of the verse were to warn and threaten those who reject the messengers, then it should have said "the end of the deniers," as we mentioned above.

وَ لا تَحْزَنْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَ لا تَكُنْ فِي ضَيْقٍ مِمَّا يَمْكُرُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

(27:70) ***And grieve not for them and be not distressed because of what they plan.***

That is: Let not their insistence in disbelief and defiance grieve you. Let not your breast feel tightened due to their plots to refute your call and to bar people from the path of God. They are under the eye of God; they cannot render Him helpless; and He shall certainly requite them for their actions.

This verse serves as solace to the Prophet. The second part of the verse—"*and be not distressed because of what they plan*"—is added to the first part as an interpretation of it.

وَ يَقُولُونَ مَتى هذَا الْوَعْدُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صادِقِينَ ﴿٧١﴾

(27:71) ***And they say: When will this promise come to pass, if you are truthful?***

Apparently "this promise" means the threat of punishment, including both punishment in this world and punishment in the hereafter. This comprehensive meaning is based on the context of the verses. The rest of the verse is clear.

قُلْ عَسى أَنْ يَكُونَ رَدِفَ لَكُمْ بَعْضُ الَّذِي تَسْتَعْجِلُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾

(27:72) ***Say: Maybe*** **(ʿasā)** ***there may have drawn near to you*** **(radifa lakum)** ***some part of that which you seek to hasten on.***

Some exegetes have said that the letter *lām* in *lakum* ("to" in "to you") is added for emphasis, much like the letter *bāʾ* in the verse: *And cast not yourselves to perdition with your own hands* (bi-aydīkum) (2:195). So the meaning of *radifa lakum* is: "The abovementioned promise is following

you and will soon reach you." Others have said that *radifa* is a verb which always takes the letter *lām* to express a transitive meaning. Either way, the expression *radifa lakum* (drawn near to you) alludes to the nearness of punishment.[1]

… some part of that which you seek to hasten on: This refers to punishment in this world before the hereafter. The polytheists used to ask for the fulfillment of God's promise of decisive judgment, and such a judgment would necessitate their punishment. Worldly punishment would be part of what they were pressing for by their request for the fulfillment of God's promise. Perhaps the verse concerns their punishment in the Battle of Badr, as some have suggested.

Some exegetes have said that when God uses words like *ʿasā* and *laʿalla* (maybe, perhaps, haply) it means *wujūb* (necessity, certainty, inevitability). This is because the idea of hoping for something is based on ignorance [about the future], which is not applicable to God. Therefore, "*maybe there may have drawn near to you*" means "punishment will draw near you and overtake you for sure."

The problem with the above view is that an expression of hope is not always based on the speaker's position, but sometimes it is based on the context, the audience or other factors. This is the case in God's Book, where expressions of hope and expectation are not vis-à-vis the speaker. In this verse, since the answer is attributed to the Prophet, the prospect implied by *ʿasā* is based on the Prophet's noble soul. The meaning is: "Say: I expect the punishment may have drawn near to you." *Tafsīr Abī al-Suʿūd* says:

When kings and rulers use words like *ʿasā*, *laʿalla* and *sawfa* (maybe, perhaps, will) it is equivalent to definite expressions by others. They use these words to show grandiosity: to suggest that subtle hints by people like them are like explicit expressions by others. Thus is the case with God's promises of reward and punishment.

This is a plausible explanation.

The meaning of the verse is: Say to those who ask you about the time of God's promise: "I hope that part of the promise that you are pressing for may be close to you, and that is punishment in this world which will

1 According to the first interpretation, *radifa* means "drawn near to" and the letter *lām* emphasizes the nearness of the promise. According to the second interpretation, *radifa* means "drawn near" and the letter *lām* means "to." (Trans.)

take you closer to the punishment in the hereafter and lead you to it."

وَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَ لَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لا يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٧٣﴾

(27:73) ***And surely your Lord is the Lord of grace to men, but most of them are not grateful.***

This verse, by itself, has a clear meaning. In the current context of warning and threat, it suggests that God is withholding His punishment from them while they deserve it only out of His grace upon them. However, instead of being grateful to Him for this grace, they ask for the hastening of His punishment.

وَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَيَعْلَمُ ما تُكِنُّ صُدُورُهُمْ وَ ما يُعْلِنُونَ ﴿٧٤﴾ وَ ما مِنْ غائِبَةٍ فِي السَّماءِ وَ الْأَرْضِ إِلاَّ فِي كِتابٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٧٥﴾

(27:74-75) ***And most surely your Lord knows what their breasts conceal and what they manifest. And there is nothing hidden in the heaven and the earth but it is in a clear book.***

The first verse means that the delay in their punishment is not because of God's ignorance about their condition and what they deserve due to their disbelief and defiance. Rather, He knows what their breasts hide and conceal within, and what they manifest outwardly [through action].

Then the second verse emphasizes that anything that is hidden—that is, anything which may be hidden in one way or another in the universe—is written and recorded with God.

إِنَّ هذَا الْقُرْآنَ يَقُصُّ عَلى بَنِي إِسْرائِيلَ أَكْثَرَ الَّذِي هُمْ فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٧٦﴾ وَ إِنَّهُ لَهُدىً وَ رَحْمَةٌ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٧٧﴾ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَقْضِي بَيْنَهُمْ بِحُكْمِهِ وَ هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٧٨﴾

(27:76-78) ***Surely this Qur'an declares to the Children of Israel most of what they differ in. And most surely it is a guidance and a mercy for the believers. Surely your Lord will judge between them by His judgment, and He is the Mighty, the Knowing.***

These verses strengthen the faith of the believers, comfort the Prophet's

soul, and prepare the grounds for what is mentioned below about the truth of his call. Thus they are related to what was said before: "*And grieve not for them…*" (27:70), which was a hint at the truth of his call.

Surely this Qur'an declares to the Children of Israel most of what they differ in: This verse refers to the stories of the prophets in the Qur'an, which serve to clarify the Israelites' points of difference about the prophets. One example is the truth about the Christ. In addition to stories, the verse also refers to the true beliefs and laws that are explained in the Qur'an, which were a matter of dispute among the Children of Israel.

And most surely it is a guidance and a mercy for the believers: The Qur'an guides the believers to the truth through what it recounts for the Children of Israel. It is also a mercy for the believers since it assures their hearts and solidifies their faith.

Surely your Lord will judge between them by His judgment, and He is the Mighty, the Knowing: This verse refers to the fact that the judgment between people will be up to God. He is "the Mighty Lord" Who is never overcome in His command; and He is "the Knowing Lord" Who is free from any form of ignorance or mistake in His verdict. Such is the Judge Who shall settle their disputes by His rule. Hence, the Prophet must be satisfied with his Mighty and Knowing Lord as a judge and arbiter. He should entrust the judgment [of the Israelites, or of all people] to Him, just as he should leave the punishment of the polytheists to Him. *And grieve not for them and be not distressed because of what they plan* (27:70).

فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّكَ عَلَى الْحَقِّ الْمُبِينِ ﴿٧٩﴾ إِنَّكَ لا تُسْمِعُ الْمَوْتى وَ لا تُسْمِعُ الصُّمَّ الدُّعاءَ إِذا وَلَّوْا مُدْبِرِينَ ﴿٨٠﴾ وَ ما أَنْتَ بِهادِي الْعُمْيِ عَنْ ضَلالَتِهِمْ إِنْ تُسْمِعُ إِلاَّ مَنْ يُؤْمِنُ بِآياتِنا فَهُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٨١﴾

(27:79-81) ***Therefore rely on Allah; surely you are on the clear truth. Surely you do not make the dead hear*** **(tusmiʿu, from ismāʿ)**, ***and you do not make the deaf hear the call when they go back retreating. Nor can you guide the blind out of their error; you cannot make anyone listen except for those who believe in Our communications*** **(bi-āyātinā)**, ***so they submit.***

This is a conclusion to everything that the Prophet was charged with concerning the polytheists and the differences of the Israelites. That is:

Their affair is up to God not up to you. Therefore take God as your guardian, for He shall suffice you, and fear not anything because you are in the security of the truth.

These verses justify the command to rely on God [in the last verse]. That is: We ordered you to rely on God concerning their belief and disbelief because they are dead—and it is not within your reach to make the dead hear. They are a group of deaf and blind people who do not hear, and who have strayed. You cannot make the deaf hear when they turn away retreating, nor can you guide the blind out of their error. You can only make the message reach the hearing of those who believe in Our communications that point to us. They are submissive to Us and confirm what Our signs show because they yield to Our sure proofs.

The first verse qualifies the Prophet's inability to make the deaf hear by: *when they go back, retreating*. Perhaps this qualification is meant to indicate that if they were not to retreat, one could at least make them understand by some form of sign language.

We can conclude the following points from the above explanation: (1) Here, what is meant by "making one hear" (*ismāʿ*) is "guiding the person." (2) What is meant by *āyāt* (communications, signs) is the proofs and arguments that prove *tawḥīd* (monotheism, God's unity) and the other religious facts that stem from it. (3) One who applies sound judgment and reason to the true proofs conveyed by God's signs in the horizons and the souls,[1] understands them, and then submits to them with belief and obedience—such a person is not among the dead, nor among those whose hearing and sight God has sealed.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning *peace be on His servants whom He has chosen* (27:59) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: They are Muḥammad's family.

Author's comment: This has also been narrated in *Jamʿ al-jawāmiʿ* [that is, *Jawāmiʿ al-jāmiʿ*] from the Infallibles, via an incomplete chain of transmission (*mursal*) and without specifying the Imam.

Based on our exposition of the verse, you should know that what the context of the verses suggests is that "*His servants whom He has chosen*"

1 This expression is extracted from verse 41:53. It refers to God's signs in the external world and the internal world; the macrocosm and the microcosm. (Trans.)

refer to God's prophets which were discussed in the previous verses. They were blessed as God chose them among His servants. Therefore, if the above narration about Muḥammad's family is authentic, then it would be a case of matching the verse to an application beyond its context, by extension (*al-jary wa al-inṭibāq*).

(2) Ibn ʿAbbās said concerning this verse: "They are Muḥammad's Companions."[1]

Author's comment: This is similar to the last narration. If the narration is authentic, then it would again be a case of extending the verse to other applications.

(3) Sufyān al-Thawrī said about the verse: "It was revealed *exclusively* about Muḥammad's Companions."[2]

Author's comment: Our explanation above should clarify that the verse was not revealed about them [to begin with], let alone the exclusivity.

(4) Concerning "*Nay! They are people who deviate*" (27:60) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: [They deviate] from the truth.

(5) Concerning verse 27:62 (*Rather, He Who answers the distressed one when he calls upon Him…*) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: This verse was revealed about the Qāʾim (the one who will rise up) from Muḥammad's family. By God, he is the distressed one. When he shall pray two units of prayer by the *maqām*[3] and call upon God, He shall answer him, remove the evil that he faces, and make him a vicegerent on earth.[4]

Author's comment: This narration is also an example of application; the verse itself is more general than the meaning suggested here.

(6) The Messenger of God said: Whoever parts from the *jamāʿah*

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, reporting from several books.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd and Ibn Jarīr.

3 That is Abraham's station next to the Kaʿbah. (Trans.

4 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of his father, on the authority of al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. Faḍḍāl, on the authority of Ṣāliḥ b. ʿUqbah.

> (community, congregation, majority [of Muslims]) will be cast in the Fire on his face. God says: *Rather, He Who answers the distressed one when he calls upon Him and removes the evil, and He will make you vicegerents in the earth* (27:62). *Khilāfah* (caliphate, vicegerency) is from God; if the caliph is good, then it is to his own benefit; and if he is evil, then he will be accountable to God. Your duty is to obey what God has commanded.[1]

Author's comment: This narration is not flawless. It was discussed above that given the context of the verse, vicegerency here means the vicegerency that has been ordained for every human being; that is, dominion over the earth to utilize its resources. It does not mean vicegerency in the sense of governance over the nation and spinning the wheel of society.

Besides, the text of this narration is self-contradictory. The idea that "*khilāfah* is from God" could mean that a ruler's power over the people is according to God's ordinance (*taqdīr*). In other words, it means that their power and government is attributable to God in a *takwīnī* (creational, existential) sense, as God says about Nimrod's kingdom: *Because Allah had given him the kingdom* (2:258). He also narrates from Pharaoh: *Is not the kingdom of Egypt mine?* (43:51). If this is what is meant, then it is more than clear that such *khilāfah* neither makes obedience to the ruler obligatory, nor disobeying him unlawful. Otherwise, it would contradict the entire message and mission of religions, and would necessitate obedience to people like Nimrod, Pharaoh and other such rulers. Alternatively, the idea that "*khilāfah* is from God" could refer to the ruler's appointment by religion. In other words, it means that their power and government is attributable to God legislatively (*tashrīʿī*), where God has made it obligatory to obey whatever the ruler commands, even if that is a sin. If so, then that would be an explicit contradiction of religious injunctions.

One may say that it is obligatory to obey a ruler as long as he does not command to the disobedience of God, as confirmed by the Prophetic narration: "No creature shall be obeyed in disobedience to the Creator." However, this means that it is permissible to part from the *jamāʿah* in certain cases [when the ruler commands against the orders of God], which would be a contradiction to the first part of the narration.

The same problem applies to the last part of the narration: "Your duty

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr,* on the authority of al-Ṭabarānī, on the authority of Saʿd b. Junādah.

is to obey what God has commanded." If "what God has commanded" means obedience to the ruler even when it entails disobedience to God, then that would be explicitly contrary to the legislation of religious injunctions. And if it means obedience to God even when it entails disobedience to the ruler, then that would contradict the first part of the narration [about *jamāʿah*].

Sociological discussions have made it clear today that no mature, rational society would accept a ruler who does not respect the laws that are commonly followed and respected. Thus, we should consider religion clear from such sanctions and giving such blank checks. Sometimes it is claimed that there is a greater welfare in keeping the society integrated, and that it is more important to preserve the nation's unity than preserving some of the religious injunctions. What this means, however, is permission to destroy the reality and essence of religion in order to maintain its name.

(7) Masrūq said: Once I was in the presence of ʿĀʾishah, where I was sitting and leaning back [against the wall]. In that session she said, "There are three things—if one utters any of them, he has ascribed a great lie to God." I asked, "What are they?" She said, "1. Whoever thinks that Muḥammad saw his Lord has indeed ascribed a great lie to God."

I was leaning back until then, but I sat up and asked, "O mother of the believers (Umm al-Muʾminīn), give me a second and do not rush me. Is it not that God says: *And of a truth he saw him [or Him] on the clear horizon* (81:23); *And certainly he saw him [or Him] in another descent* (53:13)?" She replied, "I was the first person in this nation to ask the Messenger of God about this. He told me: 'That was Gabriel.[1] Those were the only two times when I saw him in his original form of creation. I saw him descending from the heaven as an enormous being, so much so that he filled the distance between the heaven and the earth.'"

ʿĀʾishah continued, "Have you not heard God's words: *Eyes comprehend Him not, but He comprehends (all) eyes* (6:103)? Have you not heard that God says: *And it is not for any mortal that Allah should speak to him except by Revelation, or from behind a veil, or*

1 That is, the pronoun "him" in verses 53:13 and 81:23 refers to Gabriel, not to God. (Trans.)

by sending a messenger and revealing by His permission what He pleases. Surely He is High, Wise (42:51)?"

Then she continued, "2. Whoever thinks that Muḥammad left out anything from God's Book undisclosed has indeed ascribed a great lie to God, for God says: *O Messenger! Deliver what has been revealed to you from your Lord; and if you do it not, then you have not delivered His message, and Allah will protect you from the people* (5:67)."

She continued, "3. Whoever thinks that he can inform the people about what will happen tomorrow has ascribed a great lie to God, for God says: *Say: No one in the heavens and the earth knows the unseen but Allah* (27:65)."[1]

Author's comment: The content of this narration has certain problems. Concerning the verses that negate the possibility of seeing God, they negate the eye's sight, not the heart's insight. The vision of the heart is something beyond *īmān* (belief, faith) in the sense of *iʿtiqād* (conviction, dogma).[2] We discussed this kind of vision in detail in its own place.[3]

As with the verse, "*O Messenger! Deliver…*" (5:67), we clarified in our exposition of the verse that it pertains to a particular subject, not a universal rule.[4] Even if we assume that it expresses a general rule, it would mean that the Prophet did not fail to deliver anything that was revealed to him *as a part of his message*. This, however, does not contradict the Prophet concealing certain things that were revealed to him only for himself to know.

As with the verse, "*Say: No one in the heavens and the earth knows the unseen but Allah*" (27:65), it means that God is the only one who knows about the unseen inherently and by virtue of His essence. The same is true

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Ṭayālisī, Saʿīd b. Manṣūr, Aḥmad, ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd, al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasāʾī, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Abū al-Shaykh, Ibn Mardawayh and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Asmāʾ wa al-ṣifāt*.

2 This refers to many narrations which say, "The hearts see God through the reality of *īmān*." The author's point is that "the reality of *īmān*" is something beyond a mental conception that one accepts and believes in. (Trans.)

3 See the author's discussions under verses 6:103 and 7:143. (Trans.)

4 See volume 11, pp. 48ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

about the other verses which exclusively ascribe knowledge of the unseen to God: they are only about *inherent and essential* knowledge. This does not contradict the possibility of others knowing about the unseen *through* His teaching, as indicated in these verses: *The Knower of the unseen! He does not reveal His secrets to any, except to him whom He chooses as a messenger* (72:26-27). God has narrated some examples of informing people about the unseen from the Messiah, where he says: *And I inform you of what you eat and what you store in your houses* (3:49). It is evident that if one claims that the Prophet informed the people about future events, it does not mean that he knew the unseen by himself and without being taught by God. Indeed, there are mass-transmitted (*mutawātir*) narrations by both Shias and Sunnis—despite their differences and variety—about many future events that the Prophet forecasted.

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Verses 82-93

These verses conclude the previous set of verses by talking about the Resurrection, the events after it, and some of its signs. Then the chapter ends as it started: by warning and giving glad tidings.

وَ إِذا وَقَعَ الْقَوْلُ عَلَيْهِمْ أَخْرَجْنا لَهُمْ دَابَّةً مِنَ الْأَرْضِ تُكَلِّمُهُمْ أَنَّ النَّاسَ كانُوا بِآياتِنا لا يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

(27:82) ***And when the word*** **(al-qawl)** ***shall fall upon them, We shall bring forth for them a creature from the earth that shall speak unto them that indeed*** **(anna)** ***people would*** **(kānū)** ***have no faith in Our signs.***

The previous verses were about the polytheists at the time of the Prophet—or specifically those in Mecca from the Quraysh tribe—who had the utmost degree of hostility toward the Prophet and his message. Thus, the flow of the context entails that the plural pronouns in this verse—"them" in "against them," "for them" and "unto them"—refer to the abovementioned polytheists. However, the verse is not limited to them; they are just the specific audience who were addressed at the time of revelation. Otherwise, the verse's address applies to all people from the Prophet's nation, for they are a single unit—in the sense of being subject to the same call. Therefore the later generations are subject to the same rule as the former ones. Such inclusion of audience [from the future generations] is very common in the Qur'an.

And when the word **(al-qawl)** ***shall fall*** **(waqaʿa)** ***upon them…:*** What is meant here is that "the word[1] applies to them; it is determined that the word should befall them." The same expression is seen further down: "*and*

1 Given other Qur'anic verses, what is meant by "the word" (*al-qawl*) is God's decree, especially in the sense that it is immediate, unexpected, and non-gradual. In the context of this verse, it means God's decree for the rise of the Hour, meaning the Resurrection. This matches the author's explanation below, where he says that "the word" refers to the extraordinary and unexpected signs of the Hour which will force the people to believe. (Trans.)

the word shall fall upon them" (27:85), which means "God's punishment shall befall them." Therefore, *waqaʿa* in this verse is synonymous with *ḥaqqa* (come true, become due, come to pass) in many other verses in the Qur'an, such as: *those against whom the word will come true* (ḥaqqa) (28:63). The difference between the two expressions is that in the current verse—*waqaʿa al-qawl ʿalayhim*—the emphasis is on the word *ʿalayhim* (against them), while in the other expression—*ḥaqqa ʿalayhim al-qawl* [as used in 28:63]—the emphasis is on the word *ḥaqqa*. In other words, the focus of the current verse is to identify the audience as those who will face the word. The focus of the other verses is to emphasize the settlement and establishment of the word—in a way that it does not change.

Now, what is this "word" (*al-qawl*) that shall befall them? Using God's Book, it is best to interpret it in light of the following verse: *We will soon show them Our signs in the Universe and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth* (41:53).[1] Surely what is meant by "Our signs" in this verse is not the ordinary signs of God in the heaven and the earth which are always within the sight and hearing of the people. Instead, "Our signs" means extraordinary events which would leave them no choice but to submit to God and believe [in Him and His religion]. These signs and events will befall them while they had failed to embrace faith through observing the apparent signs of God which are found all around them in the heaven and earth.

This explanation should clarify that the last part of the verse—"*that indeed people would have no faith in Our signs*"—justifies the passing of the word against them. In other words: "The word shall befall them *because* the people would not believe." The auxiliary verb *kānū* (would, used to) indicates that uncertainty and disbelief were established in them. "Our signs" mean the signs of God that are ordinarily visible in the heavens and the earth, not His extraordinary signs and miracles. The verse has also been recited with *inna* (indeed) instead of *anna* (that indeed, or indeed). The recitation of *inna* is preferred to *anna* [in terms of meaning] and it would confirm what we said above: that the last part of the verse serves as a justification for the first part. With *inna* there would be no need to

1 The connection is that the current verse (27:82) also talks about "Our signs." (Trans.)

assume an omitted letter *lām* [which would mean "because"].[1]

… We shall bring forth for them a creature (dābbah) *from the earth that shall speak unto them…:* This sentence describes one of the extraordinary signs promised in the verse: *We will soon show them Our signs in the Universe and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth* (41:53). Since it describes an extraordinary event, its "bringing forth from the earth" must mean bringing it to life after death or something similar to that [in terms of being supernatural]. The word *dābbah* (creature) is used for living beings that move on the earth, including human beings and other animals. If the creature meant here is a human being, then its speaking with the people will be an ordinary event. If the creature is an animal, then its speaking will be extraordinary just like its coming forth from the earth.

No other verse in the Qur'an explains what is meant by this creature that God shall bring forth from the earth and that will speak to the people. We have no idea what it is, what its qualities are, how it will come forth, and what it will speak about. Instead, the context of the verse is the best evidence that a sense of uncertainty and vagueness is intended here. It is meant to be a mysterious expression.

The overall meaning is: Soon, the people will not believe in Our clear signs and will lose their capacity and opportunity to believe in Us through applying reason and learning lessons [from the previous generations]. When that happens, We will show them the extraordinary signs that We have promised them, which will make the truth evident to them such that they will be compelled to admit it. At that point We shall bring forth a creature for them from the earth that will speak to them.

The above is what we can infer from the context of the verse after pondering upon it. The exegetes have differed significantly with one another regarding the meanings of the terms and sentences in the verse, the overall message of the verse, the reality of this creature, its qualities, the meaning of what it says, as well as the process, the time, the location and the

1 The common recitation of *anna* suggests that the last part of the verse is the speech of the creature. If the sentence is to be interpreted as a justification for the first part, it would imply: *li-anna*, where the letter *lām* is omitted. If the word is recited as *inna*, it means that the last part of the verse is an independent statement from the previous part of the verse, mentioned as an explanation and clarification for why the word shall befall the people. (Trans.)

frequency of its emergence. They have proposed many views that cannot be supported by any solid foundation other than contrivance and forced interpretation. That is why we skipped mentioning and discussing them. Those who are interested in them should refer to the lengthy books of *tafsīr*.

وَ يَوْمَ نَحْشُرُ مِنْ كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ فَوْجاً مِمَّنْ يُكَذِّبُ بِآياتِنا فَهُمْ يُوزَعُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾

(27:83) *And on the day* (yawma) *when We will gather* (naḥshuru, from ḥashr) *of* (min) *every nation a party* (fawjan) *of* (min) *those who rejected Our signs* (bi-āyātinā)*, then they shall be formed into groups* (yūzaʿūna, from īzāʿ).

According to al-Rāghib, *fawj* is "a group that is moving rapidly." *Īzāʿ* means "to stop a group so that those in the front and those in the back may gather together."

The inflection of the word *yawma* (the day) is *manṣūb* (in the accusative case) because it is the object of an implied omitted verb. In full, it would mean *And remember* (udhkur) *the day when…*

What is meant by *ḥashr* here is "gathering the people after death," because those who are gathered are parties from every nation, and such a gathering at the same time does not occur during the people's lives [in this world]. The particle *min* (lit. "of" or "from") in "*of* (min) *every nation*" is a partitive one (*tabʿīḍiyyah*). The same particle in "*of* (min) *those who rejected*" is either partitive or descriptive (*bayāniyyah*).[1]

… those who rejected Our signs…: Here, "signs" (*āyāt*) are meant in an unconditional sense, including any sign of the origin [that is, God] and the end [that is, the Resurrection]. That would include the prophets, the Imams, and the divine scriptures, not the Resurrection itself or the events that will occur at the end of the world. These "signs" should not be limited to the verses (*āyāt*) of the Qur'an, because the gathering (*ḥashr*) does not apply to the Muslims alone, but will include parties from various nations. It is strange how one exegete has insisted that what is said here is

1 If both are partitive, the meaning would be: "We will gather a subset from every nation who will be a subset of their disbelievers." If the first one is partitive and the second one is descriptive, the meaning would be: "We will gather a subset from every nation and they will be those who rejected Our communications." (Trans.)

explicit evidence that *āyāt* in this verse and the next means the verses of the Qur'an. He has justified this view by saying:

The next verse talks about *āyāt* that they "*had no comprehensive knowledge of*" (27:84), meaning things that they had to ponder upon in order to grasp. This only applies to the verses of the Qur'an which include proofs of the truth, not to things like the Hour and what shall happen then.

The problem with this argument is obvious. The fact that *āyāt* cannot be referring to the Hour and its events does not prove that it refers to the verses of the Qur'an *alone*, because the verse is more than clear that those who will be gathered are parties from *all nations*, while the Qur'an is a book for only one party among them.

The verse is clearly not about the ultimate gathering on the Day of Resurrection, because it talks about the gathering of *a part of* every nation, not *all of them*. This is contrary to how God describes the gathering on the Day of Resurrection: *And We will gather them and leave not any one of them behind* (18:47).

Some have suggested that the verse is about gathering a group for punishment after the universal gathering of all people. That is, it refers to a specific gathering after the initial gathering [of everyone upon the Resurrection].

However, had this been the case, the verse should have said so to clarify any ambiguity, as He says elsewhere: *And on the day that the enemies of Allah shall be gathered* (yuḥsharu, from ḥashr) *to the Fire, then they shall be formed into groups. Until they come to it* (41:19-20). Meanwhile, what follows below [in verse 27:87] mentions rebuke and decisive judgment, but not punishment. The current verse mentions "gathering" (*ḥashr*) in an absolute sense, without any sign that it refers to a specific gathering [of a particular group]. This is confirmed by the next verse which says "*until they come*," (27:87) without specifying what they come to. It does not say "until they come to the punishment," or "to the Fire," or anything like that.

The above view is further confirmed by the following two pieces of evidence: (1) These two verses [27:83-84] appear after the verse about the emergence of a creature from the earth [27:82], which is one of the signs of the Resurrection [and thus will occur *before* the Resurrection]. (2) These verses are mentioned *before* the verses that talk about the events that will occur on the Day of Resurrection: *And on the day when the Trumpet shall be blown…* (27:87). It does not make sense to mention one of the events

of the Day of Resurrection before introducing the Resurrection itself and setting up the stage. If the gathering of a party from every nation were something that would happen on the Day of Resurrection, then it should have been mentioned *after* talking about the blow of the Trumpet and the coming of people in abasement [27:87]. That would have been the natural sequence of events.

One exegete—who has interpreted this verse as referring to the gathering on the Day of Resurrection—has realized the above objection, and has answered it as follows:

Perhaps the reason why this event is mentioned before the blowing of the Trumpet and the rise of the Hour is to indicate that each of these events is a great catastrophe and a shocking calamity that is worth mentioning separately on its own. If they were to be mentioned in order, the audience might have had the misconception that these events together comprise a single great disaster.

Our readers would agree that the above explanation is contrived and unsatisfactory. If it were as this exegete has said, then the verses should have first prevented the impression that this gathering is different from the gathering on the Day of Resurrection by placing the verse after the verse on the blowing of the Trumpet, and then adding a point to clarify the possible misconception that the exegete has suggested.

Thus it is clear that the verse—according to its apparent meaning—talks about a gathering before the gathering on the Day of Resurrection. Nevertheless, this idea is not entirely explicit in the text of the verse such that it cannot be interpreted otherwise.

حَتَّى إِذا جاؤُ قالَ أَ كَذَّبْتُمْ بِآياتِي وَ لَمْ تُحِيطُوا بِها عِلْماً أَمَّا ذا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٨٤﴾

(27:84) ***Until they come, He will say: Did you reject My signs* (bi-āyātī)** ***while you had no comprehensive knowledge of them? Or what was it that you did?***

Based on the context, "*when they come*" means when they appear in the position where they are addressed by God: *Did you reject…?* As in the previous verse, "signs" (*āyāt*) include anything that points to the truth.

… while you had no comprehensive knowledge of them…: This phrase describes their state of rejection (called *ḥāliyyah*). It means, "You rejected

My signs while you were in a condition in which you had no knowledge of them to turn away from them. So why did you reject (*takdhīb*) something that you had no knowledge of?" That is, "You accused My signs of being a lie (*kidhb*, *kadhib*) and not being binding proofs while what you said was not based on knowledge."

… or what was it that you did?: That is, "did you do anything other than rejection?"[1]

The meaning of the verse is: They shall come until they appear in the position of being addressed. Then God will tell them, "Did you reject My signs while you had no comprehensive knowledge of them, or did you do anything other than rejecting My signs?"

This is a way of rebuking them which shows that they did not engage in anything other than rejecting God's signs; they had no better occupation that could have kept them busy from that.

وَ وَقَعَ الْقَوْلُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِما ظَلَمُوا فَهُمْ لا يَنْطِقُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾

(27:85) ***And the word shall fall upon them because they were unjust* (bi-mā ẓalamū),** ***so they shall not speak.***

The letter *bā'* (lit. "by, for, because") in *bi-mā ẓalamū* shows causality, and the particle *mā* turns the verb into a verbal noun (called *maṣdariyyah*). It means: "The word shall befall them *because* of their injustice" or "*because* they were unjust."

… so they shall not speak: The letter *fā'* (so, then, therefore) shows that this sentence is a consequence of the word coming to pass against them. This explanation confirms that "the word" which shall befall them is being guided by God, as He says elsewhere: *Surely Allah does not guide the unjust people* (6:144). The meaning is: Because they were unjust in their rejection of Our signs, they were not guided to anything that would exempt them [from Our punishment]. Thus they will be cut from speech; *so they shall not speak*.

Some exegetes have interpreted "the falling of the word upon them" as God's punishment becoming incumbent on them. However, it is better to say that the word that shall befall them is His *decree* of punishment

1 Given the author's interpretation below, this is meant as a rhetorical question that implies a negation. It means: "All you did with My signs was to reject them as lies." (Trans.)

against the unjust. This divine decree is stated in other verses, such as: *Lo! The iniquitous shall remain in lasting chastisement* (42:45). The meaning would then be: "Because they were unjust, punishment was decreed for them, and thus they have nothing to say." However, the previous meaning is more plausible [given the theme and flow of the verses].

"The falling of the word" has also been interpreted as "God's punishment and their entrance into the Fire," but this view is unlikely in this context because it does not match what is mentioned as its consequence: *so they shall not speak*.

أَ لَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا جَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِيَسْكُنُوا فِيهِ وَ النَّهارَ مُبْصِراً إِنَّ فِي ذلِكَ لَآياتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٨٦﴾

(27:86) *Have they not seen that We have made the night that they may rest therein, and the day to give light? Most surely there are signs in this for a people who believe.*

The previous verses said that many people are deaf and blind as they do not give ear to the word of truth, do not reflect on the signs of God, and do not take lessons from them [27:80-81]. Then they mentioned the creature of the earth, which God shall bring forth as an extraordinary sign that will talk to them [27:82]. Then it was said that He will gather a party from the deniers of every nation and they will have no excuse to offer Him because they turned away from His signs without having knowledge about them [27:83-85]. Now this verse continues to rebuke the disbelievers by saying that not only are they blameworthy for denying the signs of God out of ignorance, they are also blameworthy because they could naturally see the night in which they could rest, and could see the bright days in which they could observe the signs of the heaven and earth. So why did they not open their eyes?!

… Most surely there are signs in this (dhālika) for a people who believe: The demonstrative pronoun "this" (*dhālika*) refers to how the night is made for rest, and how the day is made bright so that people can see the signs of the heavens and the earth. In these there are signs for a people who are submissive to and receptive of the truth that is so evident.

"Signs" (*āyāt*) here mean any aspect of the night and day which indicates God's unity and the religious teachings that stem from that. Among these signs is humankind's need to rest in a condition that is fit for resting,

and that is the night which covers the eyes by its darkness. Likewise, they indicate humankind's need to move about in a situation that is suitable for moving, and that is the bright day which enables the eyes to see what is beneficial for life.

The lesson in these two signs is that one must keep silent about what is covered from him by the darkness of ignorance, should not speak without knowledge, and should not reject what he has no comprehensive knowledge of. Instead, one should announce and believe in the clear signs that are evident like the bright day.

وَ يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ فَفَزِعَ مَنْ فِي السَّماواتِ وَ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلاَّ مَنْ شاءَ اللَّهُ وَ كُلٌّ أَتَوْهُ داخِرِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾

(27:87) ***And on the day when the Trumpet shall be blown, then those who are in the heavens and those who are in the earth shall be terrified*** **(fa-fazi^{c}a, from faza^{c})** ***except those whom Allah wills, and all shall come to Him abased*** **(dākhirīn, from dukhūr).**

"Blowing the Trumpet" is a metaphorical expression for informing a multitude, like an army, to do what they are supposed to do collectively, such as gathering in one place or marching. According to al-Rāghib, *faza^{c}* is "a feeling of psychological contraction and aversion due to a scary event." It is of the same nature as *jaza^{c}* (anxiety, impatience). *Dukhūr* means "dishonor, abasement."

Some exegetes have said: This verse refers to the second blow of the Trumpet, through which life is blown back into the dead bodies, and they rise for the final judgment.[1] This is confirmed by the following points: (1) the subsequent part of the verse, which refers to the appearance of everyone before God: *and all shall come to Him abased*; (2) the exception of: *whom Allah wills* from the terror; and (3) stating that "*whoever brings good… shall be secure from terror on the day*" (27:89). All of these expressions suggest that the *faza^{c}* (terror, fear) mentioned in this verse is the second blow of the Trumpet.

Others have said: The verse refers to the first blow of the Trumpet, at which all living beings die, as seen in the verse: *And the Trumpet shall be blown, so all those that are in the heavens and all those that are in the earth*

1 The two blows of the Trumpet are discussed in verse 39:68. (Trans.)

shall swoon (fa-ṣaʿiqa, from ṣaʿqa), *except such as Allah please; then it shall be blown again, then lo! They shall stand up, awaiting* (39:68). They swoon as a result of terror (that is, their *ṣaʿqah* is because of their *fazaʿ*), and that occurs after the first blow of the Trumpet. Based on this interpretation, the subsequent part of the verse—"*and all shall come to Him abased*"—refers to the return of everyone to God through death.

Perhaps we can say that the verse means the blow of the Trumpet in an absolute sense, including both the first blow, which causes death, and the second blow, which gives life. Both blows are among the specific events pertaining to the Hour [which is the subject of discussion in these verses]. What is said about the terror of some beings and the motion of the mountains [27-87-88] could specifically pertain to the first blow, and what is said about the coming of all in abasement [27:87] could be among the specific features of the second blow. This explanation would answer the objections that may be raised against both of the above suggested interpretations.

In this verse, God excludes some of His servants from the universal rule of terror that will include everyone in the heavens and the earth. This exception is interpreted further below, where He says: *and they shall be secure from terror on the day* (27:89).

… and all shall come to Him abased: Apparently this statement includes everyone, even those who are secure from the terror. Everyone in the heavens and the earth will return to God, meaning that they will rise and appear before Him. He says elsewhere: *They shall most surely be brought up. But not the servants of Allah, the purified ones* (37:127-128). The exception of God's "purified servants" (*al-mukhlaṣūn*) means that they will not be summoned for *reckoning and questioning* [on the Day of Judgment], not that they will not *return* to God and will not *appear* before Him at all. The verses about the Resurrection explicitly show the universality of the Resurrection, such that it includes every single soul.

Ascribing abasement to God's friends (*awliyāʾ*) does not contradict their honor in the sight of God, because what gives a servant honor before God is his abasement before Him, and one's sufficiency by God is his poverty to Him. Meanwhile, the abasement of His enemies who used to assume a false sense of honor for themselves will be a humiliating

abasement.[1]

وَ تَرَى الْجِبالَ تَحْسَبُها جامِدَةً وَ هِيَ تَمُرُّ مَرَّ السَّحابِ صُنْعَ اللَّهِ الَّذِي أَتْقَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ إِنَّهُ خَبِيرٌ بِما تَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾

(27:88) ***And you see the mountains, you think them to be solid, passing by as the passing of the clouds—the handiwork of Allah Who has made everything in perfection; surely He is Aware of what you do.***

This verse is in a thread of verses about the Resurrection, and is enveloped in this context. Therefore, it should be interpreted as describing one of the signs and events that will occur at that time: the movement of the mountains. God has referred to the same idea in other verses, such as: *and the mountains shall be moved off so that they shall remain a mere semblance* (78:20).

And you see the mountains…: This is addressed to the Prophet, and is meant to depict the scene for him, much like the verse: *and you shall see men intoxicated* (22:2). That is: The mountains will be in a moving condition on that day, and this condition will be visible; you would see it if you were present and witness there.

… you think them to be solid…: That is: "Since the Resurrection has not yet occurred, you think that the mountains are solid and unmoving." This is a separate sentence mentioned as an aside or parenthetical remark (*muʿtariḍah*). It could also be *ḥāliyyah* [that is, describing the Prophet's state of seeing].[2]

… passing by as the passing of the clouds…: This describes the state of the mountains while the Prophet sees them. The meaning is: When the Trumpet is blown, you will see the mountains drifting away like clouds

1 In other words, "abasement" in this verse refers to everyone being submissive before the *insurmountable rule and kingdom* of God on that day. Abasement in the sense of disgrace and humiliation is a different issue which is not the primary import of the verse. (Trans.)

2 If the sentence is *muʿtariḍah*, the meaning would be: "On that day you will see the mountains—which now you find to be solid—passing by…" If it is *ḥāliyyah*, the meaning would be: "While now you think the mountains to be solid, on that day you will see them passing by..." (Trans.)

passing in the sky.

… the handiwork of Allah **(ṣunᶜ Allāh)** ***Who has made everything in perfection…:*** "*The handiwork of Allah*" is an object of an implied omitted verb, to the effect of: "Allah has made this handiwork of His" (*ṣanaᶜahu ṣunᶜan*). Overall, this sentence alludes to the idea that such acts by God appear to be a way of destroying this world and obliterating the universe, but in reality they are a way of perfecting and ordering it, for they bring everything to its goal, and make everyone reach their end in the direction that they are pursuing, toward either happiness or wretchedness. This [creation] is the handiwork of God Who has made everything in perfection, and He would never deprive any being from the perfection that He has given it, and would not let corruption or disorder dominate what He has properly set in place. In other words, in the destruction of this world, there is the construction of the hereafter.

… surely He is Aware of what you do: Some exegetes have interpreted this sentence as follows: It is a justification for what was mentioned above—that the blow of the Trumpet and its subsequent events are the perfect works of God. His awareness of people's apparent and hidden deeds calls for exposing them, revealing their good and evil qualities as they really are, and giving them due reward or punishment after the Resurrection and the gathering of the people, and the movement of the mountains.

However, the reader should realize that the above interpretation is contrived because it is contrary to the context of the verses.

Others have said: This sentence is an answer to an assumed question, as if it were asked: "So what shall happen after these striking events?" So the verse answers: "Surely God is Aware of the acts of all actors, and He shall requite them for what they did." Then this is explained further in the next two verses: *Whoever brings good, he shall have better than it…* (27:89-90).

But perhaps we can propose another interpretation which is deduced from deep reflection on the flow of the previous verses. We saw that God commands His prophet to rely on Him and leave the polytheists and the Children of Israel to Him [27:76-79], because he can only guide those who believe in the signs of God and who submit to the truth [27:81]. As for the polytheists who are engrossed in defiance, and the Children of Israel who disagree [with one another], they have dead, deaf and blind souls. They do not hear the truth and fail to find their way to it through

observing God's signs in the heaven and the earth and taking lessons from them [27:80-81]. All of this, of course, is a result of their own volition.

Then the verses talked about what they shall encounter while they are in this state where God's signs have no impact on them: a creature from the earth shall come forth and speak to them, and that is an extraordinary sign that will force them to accept the truth [27:82]. Further, there will be a group of deniers who will be gathered from every nation, and God's argument will be completed against them [27:83-85]. Finally, in the hereafter, God is Aware of their deeds; He will repay whoever brings good or evil according to his action, and that will be on the day when the Trumpet will be blown, when everyone will come to Him, being terrified and abased [27:87].

Contemplating the above context clarifies that it is best to take "*the day when the Trumpet shall be blown*" (27:87) as the time for "*surely He is Aware of what you do*" (27:88). Also, the recitation of the verse as *yafʿalūna* in the third person (what *they* do) is preferred to the common recitation [of *tafʿalūna*] in the second person (what *you* do).

The implied meaning is: On the day when the Trumpet will be blown and everyone in the heavens and earth come to Him abased, surely He will be Aware of their actions. He will reward those who bring good by better than their deeds [27:89], and those who bring evil by throwing them in the Fire on their faces [27:90]. Everyone will be requited according to his action.

Based on this interpretation, the verse would be equivalent in meaning to the following verses: *Does he not then know when what is in the graves is raised, and what is in the breasts is brought out? Most surely their Lord that day shall be fully aware of them* (100:9-10), and: *the day when they shall come forth, nothing concerning them will remain hidden to Allah* (40:16).

This way, the next two verses—"*whoever brings good…*" (27:89-90)—would elaborate on "*surely He is Aware of what you do*" in the sense that they discuss the *implications* of God's knowledge about their deeds. He rewards them for their deeds according to His knowledge of them. We can also see this connection at the end of the two verses, where He says: *Shall you be rewarded (for) aught except what you did?* (27:89). The transition from the third person to the second person—in "*Shall you be rewarded…?*" (27:89)—is to emphasize the rebuke that is implied by this rhetorical question.

There are two more views about: *and you see the mountains, you think them to be solid, passing by as the passing of the clouds…* (27:88):

(1) It refers to trans-substantial motion (*al-ḥarakat al-jawhariyyah*), that the very substance (*jawhar*) of things, like mountains, is moving toward the goal of that thing, which is to be resurrected and returned to God.

This view is very pertinent especially because the verse says, "*you think them to be solid*," which suggests that the mountains are moving right now, before the Resurrection. Otherwise, one cannot say that both parts of the verse—about the mountains moving, and their motion being unnoticeable—take place in the hereafter.

(2) It refers to the translational movement of the earth. This is a good meaning with respect to the verse itself, but it suffers from two problems: (a) It would cut off the verse from the verses before and after it, which pertain to the Resurrection. (b) It would leave no connection between "*surely He is Aware of what you do*" and the first part of the verse.

مَنْ جاءَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ فَلَهُ خَيْرٌ مِنْها وَ هُمْ مِنْ فَزَعٍ يَوْمَئِذٍ آمِنُونَ ﴿٨٩﴾

(27:89) *Whoever brings good, he shall have better than it; and they shall be secure from terror on the day.*

As we said above, this verse and the next one are an elaboration of the statement, "*Surely He is Aware of what you [or they] do*" (27:88), in the sense that they discuss reward and punishment, which are the consequences of God's awareness of what they do.

Whoever brings good, he shall have better than it…: It means that his reward will be better than the good that he brings. This is because a good deed to its reward is like the means to the end, regardless of what the good deed is. Whereas the reward is the purpose, the deed is a preliminary that is intended for that objective. The end goal is always superior to its preliminary.

… and they shall be secure from terror on the day: Given the context, "terror" (*fazaʿ*) here refers to the terror after the second blow of the Trumpet, not the first. Thus the verse means the same thing as: *The great terror shall not grieve them, and the angels shall meet them: This is your day which you were promised* (21:103).

وَ مَنْ جاءَ بِالسَّيِّئَةِ فَكُبَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ فِي النَّارِ هَلْ تُجْزَوْنَ إِلاَّ ما كُنْتُمْ

تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٠﴾

(27:90) ***And whoever brings evil, these shall be thrown down on their faces*** **(fa-kubbat wujūhuhum, from kabba)** ***into the Fire; shall you be rewarded (for) aught except what you did?***

When someone is thrown down on his face and falls on it, it is said: *kabbahu ʿalā wajihi*. The verse literally says, "*Their faces* will be thrown down," which is a metaphorical expression. What is meant is: "*They* will be thrown down *on their faces*."

… shall you be rewarded (for) aught except what you did?: This is a rhetorical question that implies a negation. It means: This reward of yours is nothing but the very action that you did, which now becomes evident to you and is inseparable from you. Hence there is no injustice in [your] reward, nor any wrong in [God's] judgment.

These two verses [27:89-90] are meant to describe the nature of good and evil deeds in terms of the rewards that they entail. The verses state the case of one who brings only good deeds, and one who is surrounded by his sin and is plunged in evil. As with one who carries both good and evil deeds, one can know his overall position given these two verses, but an elaborate account of such individuals is discussed in other verses, not here.

إِنَّما أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ رَبَّ هذِهِ الْبَلْدَةِ الَّذِی حَرَّمَها وَ لَهُ كُلُّ شَیْءٍ وَ أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِینَ ﴿٩١﴾

(27:91) ***I am commanded only that I should serve the Lord of this city, Who has made it sacred, and His are all things; and I am commanded that I should be of these who submit.***

These three verses—from here to the end of the chapter—conclude the chapter. They clarify that the Prophet's call is only a message of glad tidings and warning. This call completes the proof [against the people] without leaving anything of their affair to the Prophet. Their case is only up to God to decide, and He will certainly show them His signs so that they will realize them. He is not heedless of what they do.

I am commanded only that…: It is implied that the speaker here is the Prophet. It is equivalent to: "Say: I have only been commanded to serve the Lord of this city." The city that is referred to in this verse is the

holy city of Mecca. The expression here glorifies this city two ways: (1) It says, "*the Lord of this city*," where the Lord is ascribed to the city. (2) The city is described as "sacred," as the verse says: *the Lord of this city Who has made it sacred*. This is a subtle criticism of them: God rebukes them for being ungrateful for the blessing of being in a sacred city. Instead of thanking God by worshiping Him alone, they deviated from Him and worshiped the idols.

… and His are all things…: This sentence refers to the vastness of God's dominion. It refutes the potential misconception that He is the Lord and Owner of Mecca alone. If so, then He would have been like the other idols, because the polytheists believed that each of their gods owned only one part of the universe, such as the heaven, the earth, this land, that tribe, so-and-so's family, and so on. That would make God at the same level as their other gods and one of them.

… and I am commanded that I should be of these who submit: That is: I am commanded to be of those who submit to Him in what He has willed and decreed, which is nothing but what humankind's creation guides to and what their innate nature calls for. That is Abraham's religion, which is the pure faith that is according to our innate nature and disposition (*fiṭrah*).

وَ أَنْ أَتْلُوَا الْقُرْآنَ فَمَنِ اهْتَدى فَإِنَّما يَهْتَدِى لِنَفْسِهِ وَ مَنْ ضَلَّ فَقُلْ إِنَّما أَنَا مِنَ الْمُنْذِرِينَ ﴿٩٢﴾

(27:92) ***And that I should recite the Qur'an. Therefore whoever goes aright, he goes aright for his own soul, and whoever goes astray, then say: I am only one of the warners.***

The conjunction "and" joins this verse to: *I am commanded only that I should serve* (27:91). It means: "I am commanded that I should recite the Qur'an." What is meant here reciting the Qur'an *to the people*, because it then concludes: *Therefore whoever goes aright…*

… Therefore whoever goes aright, he goes aright for his own soul…: That is: Whoever finds guidance through this Qur'an only benefits himself. I do not reap any benefit from others being guided.

… and whoever goes astray, then say: I am only one of the warners: That is: Whoever is not guided by it due to turning away from the remembrance of his Lord—which is tantamount to going astray (*ḍalāl*)—then his

straying and the burden of his disbelief will be upon himself, not upon me. I am only a warner; I am charged with warning him, but I am not a guardian over him. God is the guardian over him.

Given the apparent flow of the verse, it should have said: "And whoever goes astray, then I am only one of the warners" [without "say"], but instead it says: *And whoever goes astray, then say: I am only one of the warners*. This is to remind the Prophet of what he was told above—that he is naught but a warner; that none of their affairs are up to him; and that he must rely on his Lord and defer their affairs to Him. God said above: *Therefore rely on Allah; surely you are on the clear truth. Surely you do not make the dead hear…* (27:79-81). It is as if the verse is saying: "And whoever goes astray, then tell him: I have been told that my Lord has not charged me with anything except warning; thus I am not accountable for the misguidance of one who goes astray."

وَ قُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ سَيُرِيكُمْ آياتِهِ فَتَعْرِفُونَها وَ ما رَبُّكَ بِغافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٣﴾

(27:93) ***And say: Praise be to Allah, He will show you His signs so that you shall recognize them; nor is your Lord heedless of what you do.***

This verse adds to: *then say: I am only one of the warners* (27:92). It refers to the same message that God told His prophet above, after commanding the Prophet to rely on Him with regard to the affairs of the people [27:70 and 27:79]. He said that He will soon bring about an evil end for the polytheists [27:72], will judge between the Children of Israel about what they differed in [27:76-78], will show them His signs which will force them to accept it [27:82-85], and will reward them for their actions [27:89-90].

It effectively means that glorious praise is due to God for how He runs His kingdom. He has called the people to what ensures their good and felicity. Then He follows that up based on how they respond to Him: (1) He guides those who believe in His signs and submit to Him. (2) As with the deniers, He makes their hearts die, deafens their ears, and blinds their eyes; thus they go astray and reject His communications.

… He will show you His signs (āyātihi) so that you shall recognize them…: This statement alludes to what was mentioned before: *And when the word shall fall upon them, We shall bring forth for them a creature from*

the earth… (27:82ff). The word "signs" (*āyāt*) is used here in a general sense, which shows that it includes all signs that would compel them to accept the truth, including what will appear to them before and after the rise of the Hour.

***… nor is your Lord heedless of what you do* (taʿmalūna):** The second person pronoun in "*your Lord*" refers to the Prophet, while "*what you do*" [in plural] refers to all servants. This sentence serves to explain and justify what was said before. It means that what was said above is *because* your actions [O community of servants] are before the sight of your Lord [O Muḥammad]. Since He is not heedless of what you do, He does not miss anything that His wisdom dictates with regards to your actions—such as calling everyone to the truth, guiding the believers on the path, leading the disbelievers astray, showing signs upon the Resurrection, and then rewarding the good-doers and evil-doers according to their deeds.

The last word has also been recited in the third person, *yaʿmalūna* (what they do), which is perhaps preferred [to *taʿmalūna*, in the second person]. That would imply a warning to the deniers. Also, by saying "your Lord" (*rabbuka*)—where the word "Lord" is ascribed to "you"—God gives solace and inspiration to His Prophet's.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning "*And when the word shall fall upon them*" (27:82) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Once the Messenger of God came across the Commander of the Faithful [that is, Imam ʿAlī] while he was sleeping in the mosque. He had piled up some pebbles and placed his head on them. The Prophet nudged him with his foot and said, "Get up, O creature of the earth (*dābbat al-arḍ*)!"

One of the Companion said, "O Messenger of God, can we also call one another by this name?" He replied, "No! By God, this [title] belongs exclusively to him. He is the creature that God has mentioned in His Book, where He says: *And when the word shall fall upon them, We shall bring forth for them a creature from the earth that shall speak unto them that indeed people would have no faith in Our signs* (27:82)."

Then he said, "O ʿAlī! When the end of time comes, God will bring you forth in the best form, and you will have a branding iron with which you will brand your enemies."

At that point someone told Imam al-Ṣādiq, "The Sunnis say that the verse says *taklimuhum* (it shall bruise them)."[1] Imam al-Ṣādiq replied, "May God bruise them (*kalamahum Allāh*) in the fire of Hell! It is *tukallimuhum* (it shall speak unto them), from *kalām* (speech)."[2]

Author's comment: There are abundant narrations along these lines in Shia sources.

(2) Once ʿAlī was asked about the creature (*al-dābbah*) [in this verse]. He said: By God it does not have a tail, but it has a beard.[3]

Author's comment: There are many narrations that describe the makeup of the creature, some of which are very strange, not to mention that they contradict one another. Those who are interested should refer to hadith collections such as *al-Durr al-manthūr* or extensive books of *tafsīr* like *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*.

(3) Ḥammād says: Once Imam al-Ṣādiq asked me, "What do the people say about this verse: *And on the day when We will gather of every nation a party* (27:83)?" "They say," I replied, "that it is about the Day of Resurrection."
He said, "That is not so, but it is about the Return (*rajʿah*). Shall God gather only a party from every nation in Resurrection and leave out the rest? Rather, the verse about the Resurrection is: *And We will gather them and leave not any one of them behind* (18:47)."[4]

Author's comment: There are abundant narrations about "the Return" in Shia sources.

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1 The root meaning of *k-l-m* is "to bruise, to wound, to injure." *Kalām* (speech) is from the same root, perhaps because of its ability to bruise one's heart and hurt one's feelings. The meaning of the verse based on *taklimuhum* would be: "The earth's creature will wound the people because they would not believe in Our signs." (Trans.)

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of his father, on the authority of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Kaʿb al-Quraṭī.

4 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of his father, on the authority of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, on the authority of Ḥammād.

(4) Concerning *And the Trumpet will be blown* (18:99) *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: There is a difference of opinion about what is meant by "the Trumpet" (*al-ṣūr*)… It is said in hadith that it is a horn that will be blown into, like the horns that emit sound.

(5) Concerning *Except those whom Allah wills* (27:87) *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: There is a hadith with an unconnected chain of narration (*marfūʿ*) which says: "They will be the martyrs [or witnesses]; they will not be terrified on that day."

(6) Concerning "*The handiwork of Allah Who has made everything in perfection*" (27:88) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It means the act of God Who has made everything firm and robust.

(7) 7. Concerning "*Whoever brings good, he shall have better than it; and they shall be secure from terror on the day. And whoever brings evil, these shall be thrown down on their faces into the Fire*" (27:89-90) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: By God, "good" is Imam ʿAlī's *wilāyah* (guardianship, authority), and "evil" (*al-sayyiʾah*) is enmity toward him.

Author's comment: This is an example of providing one of the *applications* of the verse (called *jary*), not explaining its *meaning* [which is general and unrestricted]. There are many other narrations along these lines. We shall discuss another possible interpretation for them below.

(8) Imam Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq said: People serve and worship God in three ways. (1) One group serves Him desiring His reward. This is the servitude of the greedy, and it is tantamount to desire. (2) Others serve Him fearing the Fire. This is the servitude of the slaves, and is tantamount to fear. (3) But I serve Him out of love for Him. This is the servitude of the noble, and it is tantamount to security, as He says: *And they shall be secure from terror on the day* (27:89), and: *Say: If you love Allah, then follow me, Allah will love you and forgive you your faults* (3:31). Whoever loves God, God loves him, and whomever God loves is secure.

Author's comment: This hadith makes a connection between verse 27:89—"*Whoever brings good* (ḥasana)*, he shall have better than it; and they shall be secure from terror on the day*"—and worshiping God out of

love for Him. This connection implies that "good" (*ḥasanah*) is interpreted as *wilāyah* (divine friendship), which means to serve God through love. This love necessitates the annihilation of the servant's will in God's will, whereby God becomes the guardian of His servant and conducts his affairs. This is one of the meanings of ʿAlī's *wilāyah* (guardianship, authority), because he is the possessor of *wilāyah* and the first person in this nation who entered through this door. This explanation can serve to interpret most of the narrations that match "good" (*ḥasanah*) in this verse with ʿAlī's *wilāyah*.

(9) Concerning "*Whoever brings good, he shall have better than it*" (27:89) the Prophet said: "This refers to testifying that there is no god but God." Concerning "*and whoever brings evil*" (27:90) he said, "This refers to *shirk* (polytheism, associating partners with God)." Then he said: "The former saves while the latter dooms."[1]

Author's comment: This idea is narrated from him in different words through various chains of narration. We must qualify the interpretation of "good" as "there is no god but God" by the other rulings of the sharia which are implications of this formula [that is, the testimony of faith]. This qualification should be obvious, because otherwise, the legislation of those laws would be in vain.

(10) Concerning "*I am commanded only that I should serve the Lord of this city*" (27:91) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: "This city" refers to Mecca.

(11) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: When the Messenger of God conquered Mecca, he opened the door of the Kaʿbah and ordered the drawings and images there to be wiped off. He then took the two sides of the doorframe and said, "Lo! God made Mecca sacred when He created the heavens and the earth. Thus it shall be sacred by God's sanctification until the Day of Resurrection. No one shall rouse and frighten its animals, cut its plants, pull out its herbs, or pick up what is lost there except to give it to its owner."

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Abū al-Shaykh, Ibn Mardawayh and al-Daylamī, on the authority of Kaʿb b. ʿUjzah.

Then ʿAbbās said, "Except for *idhkhar* (a type of grass),[1] O Messenger of God? Because that is needed for [building] graves and homes." The Messenger of God confirmed, "Except for *idhkhar*."[2]

Author's comment: This is also reported through Sunni chains of narration.

(12) The Prophet said: Wherever the Qur'an says "*And Allah is not at all heedless of…*" [as in 2:74], the subsequent part is *taʿmalūna* with *tāʾ* [that is, second person, "…of what *you* do"], and wherever it says, "*Nor is your Lord heedless of…*"[3] [as in 27:93] it is *yaʿmalūna* with *yāʾ* [that is, third person, "what *they* do"].[4]

The End
All praise belongs to God.

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1 This is a grass of the genus Cymbopogon, which was used to fill the gaps and cracks in ceilings and the graves. Nawaʾī, *Sharḥ al-Muslim* (Beirtu: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1987), 9:127. (Trans.)

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of his father, on the authority of Ḥammād b. ʿĪsā, on the authority of Ḥarīz.

3 The difference is that in the first phrase it says "God" (*Allāh*), while in the second phrase it says "your Lord" (*rabbuka*). This confirms the author's preference above, in exposition of verse 27:93. (Trans.)

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Ibn Masʿūd.